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ABSTRACT

The essays in this collection place the current Afrocentric movement in its historical context and offer alternative suggestions about how to teach African American students about their history. The first section deals with the roots of Afrocentrism, analyzes the content of Afrocentric books and curricula, and discusses the impact of Afrocentrism on the African American community. The second section offers practical alternatives to the current Afrocentric fare. The following essays are included: (1) "The Anatomy of Afrocentrism" (Gerald Early); (2) "In Fairness to Afrocentrism" (Wilson J. Moses); (3) "Africa and the Afrocentrists" (Louis Wilson); (4) "The Origins of the 'Stolen Legacy'" (Mary Lefkowitz); (5) "The Distortions of Afrocentric History" (Clarence E. Walker); (6) "What's Wrong with the Portland Baseline Essays?" (Erich Martel); (7) "Afrocentrism in the Textbooks" (Gilbert T. Sewall); (8) "A Teacher's Look at Afrocentrism" (Rosalind Johnson); (9) "The Racial Idiocy of Afrocentrism" (Michael Meyers); (10) "The Need for Myths" (David Nicholson); (11) "This African American Still Feels Black" (Leon Wynter); (12) "Race Is Still a Black and White Issue" (Hugh Pearson); (13) "How Multiculturalism Abuses Ethnoracial Categories" (David A. Hollinger); (14) "Beyond the Afrocentric Con" (Stanley Crouch); (15) "How To Teach about Ancient History: A Multicultural Model" (Frank J. Yurco); and (16) "What Every Student Should Know" (opinions of numerous experts). (SLD)

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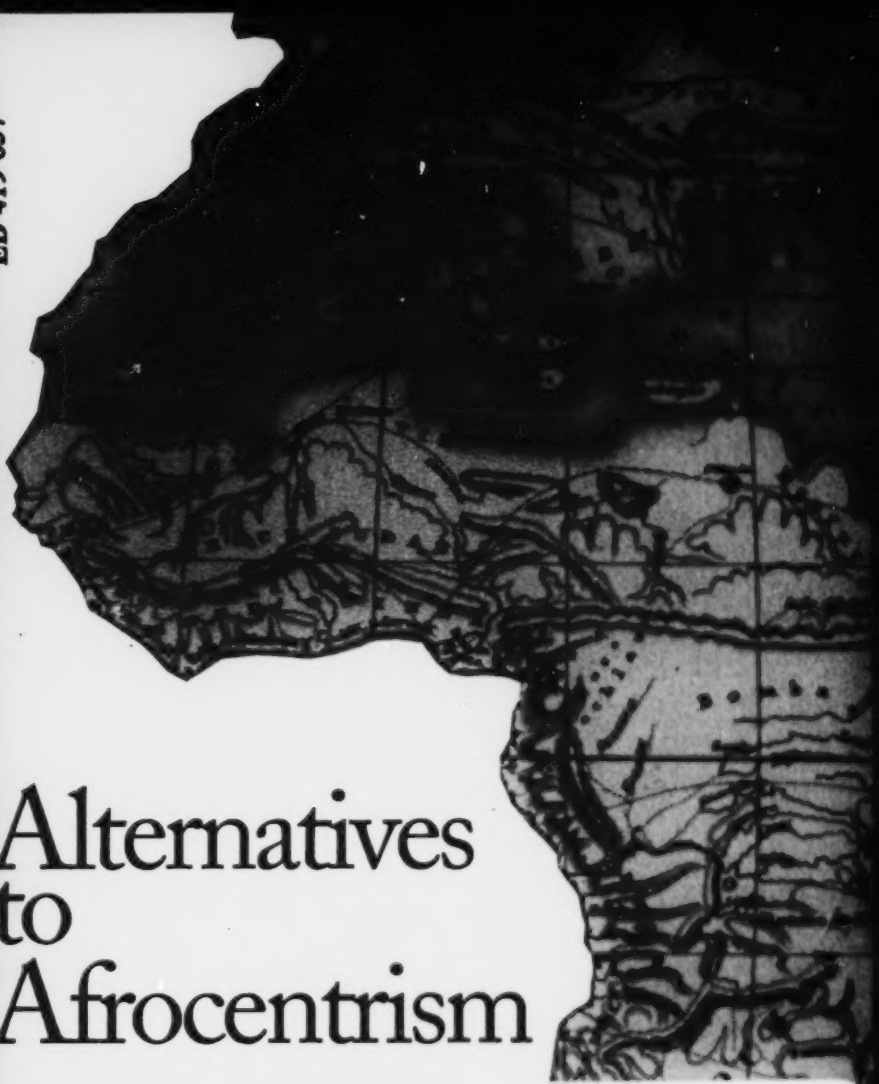

Alternatives to Afrocentrism

Second Edition

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Alternatives to Afrocentrism

Second Edition

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Preface: The Myth of Self-Esteem

by Linda Chavez

Within the last decade, Afrocentric curricula have become a staple of many urban schools. Afrocentric programs now operate in school systems from New York City to Portland, Oregon, but they are most widespread in districts with large African American student populations. The idea behind Afrocentrism is that black schoolchildren can learn effectively only in an environment that recognizes and amplifies their African heritage. The theory is that if students learn about the accomplishments of those who share their own racial or ethnic identities, they will develop an enhanced sense of self-esteem, which in turn will promote learning.

Most Afrocentric materials try to bolster student confidence by emphasizing the achievements of African cultures, especially ancient Egyptian culture, and of individuals of African descent. Nonetheless, Afrocentrists can summon scant empirical evidence to show that students actually improve performance when they feel good about themselves and their heritage, despite the conventional wisdom in educational circles on this point. A major study by a group hoping to confirm a link between self-esteem and achievement, the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and

Personal and Social Responsibility, actually found little association between the two. After rigorous scholarly examination of the connection between self-esteem and academic achievement, drug use, teenage pregnancy, crime, child abuse, and welfare dependency, the authors concluded that individual self-esteem did not cause or explain behavior in any of these areas. "One of the disappointing aspects of every chapter in this volume ... is how low the associations between self-esteem and its consequences are in research to date," the group noted in its 1989 book, *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem* (University of California Press).

Still, school administrators are eager to try anything that might improve student achievement and discipline in systems plagued by poor physical plants; indifferent parents; and drugs, crime, and violence in communities and schools. A legion of Afrocentric scholars, consultants, and publishers claims that their philosophies and historical revisions provide a solution. The range of materials and services they provide vary considerably in both cost and quality, but many offer shoddy scholarship, and some even promote intolerance and racism. School administrators and teachers often have inadequate resources to judge the good from the bad but are nevertheless under enormous pressure to adopt something that will satisfy the desire to teach African American students more about their heritage, both in the U.S. and in Africa. In an effort to provide better information to help educators, parents, and other interested groups evaluate Afrocentric curricula, the **Center for Equal Opportunity** has commissioned this volume of essays, *Alternatives to Afrocentrism.*

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This is actually the second edition of a monograph originally published in 1994. More an expansion than a revision, the second edition includes almost the complete text of its predecessor, as well as entirely new material. The monograph has grown out of two academic conferences held in St. Louis in 1993 and 1995 and sponsored by CEO, the Manhattan Institute, and Washington University's Department of African and Afro-American Studies. Although several cri-

tiques of Afrocentrism have appeared both in scholarly journals and in the popular press, most of these have not attempted to place the current Afrocentric movement in its historical context or to offer alternative suggestions about how to teach African American students about their history. This book intends to deal directly with these issues.

In the first section, essayists recount the roots of Afrocentrism, analyze the content of Afrocentric books and curricula, and discuss the impact of Afrocentrism on the African American community. **Gerald Early**'s "The Anatomy of Afrocentrism" describes the several impulses that drive Afrocentrism, from the anti-Western analyses currently fashionable in the academy to the ideology of historical black nationalism to the self-improvement and positive-thinking movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. **Wilson J. Moses**'s essay, "In Fairness to Afrocentrism," traces the utopian roots of modern Afrocentrism. **Louis Wilson**'s "Africa and the Afrocentrists" describes the irony in the Afrocentrists' essentially European conception of Africa, which treats the continent and its people in monolithic and ahistorical terms.

Several of the essays concern the historical inaccuracies and fallacies in many Afrocentric books and curricula. **Mary Lefkowitz**'s "The Origins of the 'Stolen Legacy' " discusses George G.M. James's classic Afrocentric book and details the errors in its claim that Greek philosophy was stolen from black scholars in ancient Africa. "The Distortions of Afrocentric History," by **Clarence E. Walker**, describes the Afrocentrists' emphasis on elites—the kings and queens of ancient civilizations—while ignoring the history, traditions, and practices of the vast majority of African peoples. **Erich Martel**'s "What's Wrong With the Portland Baseline Essays?" criticizes not only the numerous factual errors in this most popular of the Afrocentric study guides but the racialism that provides the essays' unifying theme.

Gilbert T. Sewall, in "Afrocentrism in the Textbooks," shows how this ideology has infected important teaching

tools. **Rosalind Johnson**'s "A Teacher's Look at Afrocentrism" describes her own frustration with Afrocentrism as the latest in a series of failed fads intended to improve student achievement. **Michael Meyers**'s "The Racial Idiocy of Afrocentrism" urges educators to break outside the confines of race. Nonetheless, argues **David Nicholson** in "The Need for Myths," every group wants its heroes and stories of courage and accomplishment, and Afrocentrism tries, however clumsily, to fulfill that need.

The final essays in this section examine the concept of race itself. In "This African American Still Feels Black," **Leon Wynter** discusses name changes and racial pride. In "Race Is Still a Black and White Issue," **Hugh Pearson** says that blacks and whites are the focus of all this country's race talk. **David A. Hollinger** critiques bureaucratic race classification in "How Multiculturalism Abuses Ethnoracial Categories." Finally, **Stanley Crouch**, in his essay "Beyond the Afrocentric Con," asserts the need for the black community to reaffirm its commitment to excellence.

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The second section of this book offers practical alternatives to the current Afrocentric fare. **Frank J. Yurco** describes useful books, materials, and techniques in "How to Teach About Ancient History," urging teachers to take advantage of direct translations of primary sources rather than rely on the often faulty interpretations of Afrocentrists. **Joe Clark, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun, Hazel O'Leary, Anthony Walton**, and other prominent educators, writers, and scholars suggest what books every American high school student should read on the African American experience and why. **Gerald Early** concludes this volume with a bibliography of additional sources.

As several of the essays in this book note, Afrocentrism has deep roots in the African American community and represents a traditional belief with some impressive exponents, including W.E.B. DuBois. Nevertheless, much of what is currently taught in Afrocentric curricula in schools and universities lacks intellectual foundation and, what's worse, pro-

motes racial animus. Those truly interested in improving the achievement of African American students and helping all students understand more about the history of blacks in America and throughout the world should not stand for careless scholarship or racial intolerance, even when promoted as a way to build self-esteem.

More than 40 years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its landmark ruling, in *Brown* v. *Board of Education*, that separate education based on race was inherently unequal. Yet today, the most radical Afrocentrists advocate not only Afrocentric curricula, but separate schools for African American students as well, promising that segregation will bring better discipline, more learning, and higher self-esteem. The re-racialization of American education in the name of Afrocentrism does not represent progress on the path to equality—it marks an impulse to put us right back where we were before *Brown*. It demonstrates the now common inversion of the traditional principle of equality. We have already tried separating schoolchildren by race, and we have yet to overcome fully the legacy of decades of such segregation. It would be tragic indeed if we perpetuate that legacy in the name of helping this new generation of African American students.

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The Anatomy of Afrocentrism

by Gerald Early

Afrocentrism is not monolithic—there are actually many varieties of Afrocentrism. Some are demagogic and even fascist or racist in their assertions. Others are more nuanced, thoughtful, and probably worth our attention and engagement.

Despite their own diversity, most Afrocentrists tend to hold three beliefs in common. They believe that society's dominant body of scholarship exhibits a decidedly "white" or "Eurocentric" bias in support of a "white" or "Eurocentric" political and social hegemony. They believe that the Western world has smothered divergent ideas that promote a distinctly African or non-white viewpoint. They believe that African peoples around the globe can come to a full self-determination and complete humanity only when they are permitted to overthrow "white" or "Eurocentric" intellectual premises and when they can fully realize and articulate themselves through self-creation.

Where do these ideas come from? Why are they so popular at this particular moment? I might suggest three areas of inquiry.

■ **The Post-Modern Academy:** Afrocentrism has had its biggest impact on education, and the universities have played a leading role in this development. Marxism, existentialism, deconstruction, and other theories have soared in popularity among academics since the Second World War. Together, these ideas suggest that the bourgeois social order is corrupt, repressive, and arbitrary; that knowledge is power;

that truth is a bourgeois illusion; and that anyone is capable of forming an individual truth to suit personal purposes. Therefore, the rise of everyone from Jacques Derrida to Stephen Greenblatt has been just as important to Afrocentrism and its off-shoot, multiculturalism, as the political turmoil of the 1960s. In the current academic climate, where the most fashionable scholarship is often sharply anti-Western, certain kinds of Afrocentrism—as harsh critiques of the West—are made possible. At the same time, they reinforce the intellectual trends that helped spawn them.

■ **Black Nationalism:** Afrocentrism also has roots in early forms of black nationalist thought, like the Black Aesthetic of the 1970s, Black Power of the 1960s, and Pan Africanism in its many forms since the 18th century. As an ideology, Afrocentrism represents the continued longing among black Americans for some set of ideas that can bind them as a community and also offer an alternative to assimilation, which is seen by many blacks as not a viable option because of white racism or even as an outright admission of inferiority. Black people's search for a common group idea that makes little reference to a shared history of oppression helps explain why Afrocentrism has arisen at a time when blacks feel their sense of physical and spiritual community under siege by many aspects of post-industrial, liberal democratic capitalist culture. In the academy, Afrocentrism draws together the various strands of African and African American Studies, transforming them from an interdisciplinary hodgepodge into a unified discipline with its own ideological and intellectual goals, political purposes, and set of commonly understood methods and theories.

■ **Group Therapy:** Afrocentrism also stems from the great American tendency to seek mind cures and mental health through right living and right believing. Many of the recent attempts to create Afrocentric schools—which, one might say, are the black political equivalents of Hebrew or Catholic schools—come from an understandable desperation inspired within black communities beset by glaring social

problems that they cannot handle. In this respect, Carter G. Woodson's confused argument for the therapeutic value of black history for the Negro, presented in his 1933 book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*—a virtual bible for many Afrocentrists—is not unlike the works of the great mind healers and positive thinkers from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale, from Father Divine to Elijah Muhammad. Woodson made the connection between black history and black education and black self-esteem long before self-esteem became a cultural buzzword. Woodson's assertions now exist as a virtual truism among blacks. But there is no real evidence to support the claim that black history, taught in certain ways, produces black self-esteem. Indeed, some pedagogical approaches suggested by Afrocentrists might actually induce more black resentment or intensify black alienation. Neither resentment nor alienation, of course, are building blocks for a sense of community.

In Fairness to Afrocentrism

by Wilson J. Moses

The Afrocentric movement must be understood as a variety of utopian or millennialist movement, although the Afrocentric utopia is in a romanticized past, rather than a chiliastic future. Afrocentrism is not a new movement. One of the first appearances is in an 1827 editorial in *Freedom's Journal,* the first black newspaper in the United States, which asserted the relationship between black Americans and ancient Egyptians. American historians recognize in the latest revival of Afrocentrism patterns described by the late E.L. Tuveson of the University of California at Berkeley and the late William G. McLoughlin of Brown University, both of whom developed useful methods for looking at the history of American millennial movements, revivals, awakenings, and reforms. The Afrocentric tradition may also be understood within the pattern that Harold Walter Turner describes in his article, "Tribal Religious Movements," in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1979). Recently, the late St. Clair Drake, a distinguished Afro-Caribbean anthropologist at Stanford University, published the two-volume *Black Folk Here and There*, which offered, among its many treasures, a restrained and compassionate critique of Afrocentric utopianism.

Karl Mannheim, in his classic *Ideology and Utopia*, defined a utopia as an idea or movement that resembles a religion more closely than a political ideology. Millennialist movements attract the type of person Eric Hoffer describes in *The True Believer*. Afrocentrists are true believers who have

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undergone the charismatic experience that African American psychologist William R. Cross has called "the Negro to Black Conversion Experience." They start out as Saul and end up as Paul. The person who converts to Afrocentrism often changes his or her name as a sign that he or she has, to use St. Paul's language, "put off the old man and put on the new man." Afrocentrists are like the people who come knocking on your door to present you with the good news, the truth, the real truth. You cannot argue with them because they are convinced that you are the one who is confused. The person converts because he or she finds the message appealing, then works backward from what he or she needs to believe through a system of rationalizations, in order to construct "proofs." Converts speak with prophetic conviction and the more you argue with them, logically, the more passionately they explain why you are wrong. Afrocentrism is not an intellectual movement; it is a secular religion. To put it in Karl Mannheim's terms, it is not an ideology, it is a utopia.

Afrocentrism, to a social scientist, is as understandable as Christian fundamentalism. In this connection, I must mention the work of Professor Dorothy Nelkin of the Sociology Department of Cornell, whose area of research has been the problem of "creation science" in the schools. I want to make use of her model, because I think Afrocentrism and "creation science" are in the same category of behavior. They represent evangelical utopian movements that couch their belief systems in pseudo-scientific terms, and they represent the frustration of their adherents as they attempt to cope with the stresses and anxieties of modern urban life. Such enthusiasts are often well-educated people, even people with scientific and technical training, who find in religious fundamentalism some insulation from a corrupt society.

In defense of Afrocentrism, it must be observed that the father of contemporary Afrocentrism, Cheikh Anta Diop, in his *Civilization or Barbarism?*, demonstrates a respect for the concept of cultural literacy. He is opposed to the vulgar stereotype of black culture that has been dominant since the

Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Diop is also suspicious of the sentimental black cultural nationalism associated wth Leopold Senghor and the French Negritude School. Like the late African American critic Sterling Brown, Diop condemns the treatment of black folk as jazzy exotic primitives and erotic barbarians. Afrocentrists resent the tendency to define black culture in terms of "primitivism grafted onto decadence." Diop's ardent followers are also opposed to the profane, scatalogical variety of black ghetto culture that is associated with gangster rap, "signifying monkeys," and "playing the dozens" (word games based on ritualized insult). The Afrocentrist dreams of appropriating the high culture of classical civilization and disdains the low culture of gangster rap. Although some may defend 2 Live Crew on First Amendment grounds, few are sympathetic to the proposition that 2 Live Crew represents black culture. Most black nationalists, including Black Muslims and Afrocentrists, insist, to their credit, that gangster rap must be understood as a social pathology. Unfortunately, many of these same black nationalists have undermined their credibility by their fundamentalist anti-intellectualism and their paranoid ravings about the ice man inheritance, Jewish conspiracies, and melanin theory.

One of the great ironies of black American life is that historically—not so much today, but *historically*—black nationalism, while urging political separatism, has been a conduit for the transmission of high culture. Classical black nationalists and Afrocentrists since the 19th century, including John Russwurm, Frances E.W. Harper, Martin Delany, Alexander Crummell, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Pauline Hopkins, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey were committed to a civilizing mission. They made references to Egyptian civilization in the hope of focusing the minds of black folk on noble and uplifting universal values, on "the best which has been thought and said in the world." They were not cultural relativists. They believed that some cultures are better than others. They were not amused by the spectacle of illiterate schoolboys insulting one another's mothers,

just for fun. Many people feel that at least this much can be said in behalf of Afrocentrism: It focuses young minds on pyramids and temples rather than on priapic displays and foul-mouthed monkeys.

It should be remembered that the Afrocentric tradition grew up in antebellum America, where nine out of ten African Americans were slaves. The editors of *Freedom's Journal* were called "Free Africans," but in reality they were quasi-free Americans, deprived of both their African and their American heritages. Their assertion that knowledge was deliberately kept from them was correct. They and their children were banned by force of law from schools, universities, and libraries. As late as 1960, the year I graduated from high school, there were many universities in this country from which I was barred by force of law. In the schools and colleges that I did attend, I was sometimes driven to the verge of tears by the cruelty of students and of teachers. If there is a reactive anger and resentment in some Afrocentric writing, it is certainly understandable. Afrocentrism is not hate literature, however. It is a quaint, fantastic reminder of problems that our society has not yet solved, but no more anachronistic than our society's residual racism. *Leviticus* is not "hate literature." Neither is Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, nor Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, nor Milton's *Areopagitica*, although each of these classics contains some ideas that most living Americans find embarrassing, offensive, or downright hateful.

Another point to remember is that the classics of the Afrocentric tradition, which argued that the ancient Egyptians were black, were written at a time when "one drop of Negro blood" was enough to make anyone a Negro. Even today, this insane reasoning remains the basis for classifying appreciable numbers of people as "black" despite their blue eyes and blond hair. Near-white individuals as fair-skinned as Thurgood Marshall and Lena Horne were still classified as Negroes. Walter White and Adam Clayton Powell, who were absolutely white in appearance, were classified as Negroes by people who could become apoplectic at the idea that the

Pharaohs were not white. It was in the face of this illogic that the mulatto author J.A. Rogers classified his Pharaohs as black. In fact many of the Pharaohs, if transplanted across time and onto the Chattanooga Choo-Choo in 1945, would have had a hard time obtaining a Pullman berth or being seated in a dining car.

These historical arguments do not, of course, excuse the excesses of a few atypical cult authors who shamelessly exploit the fears and resentments of contemporary readers. Even here it should be remembered, however, that otherwise harmless traditions of Afrocentrism are most likely to be perverted among the unlettered, culturally deprived, and slum-shocked classes of black Americans. It is extremely unlikely that Afrocentrism will gain much of a following among the establishmentarian black scholars, who constitute the faculties of the elite universities. They do not have to live under the vicious, terrifying, humiliating conditions of Southern segregation and lynch law that drove George James over the brink in the early 1950s.

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But most people do not go over the brink. Most black Americans know Afrocentrism as a quaint, folksy cultural tradition that they encounter from early childhood in their homes and churches, their sewing circles, and their barber shops. Like most mythologies, it is only half-believed and simply represents an attempt on the part of respectable, honest people to create a positive folk mythology. This mythology is no more dangerous than the fictions associated with Betsy Ross, Honest Abe, or George Washington.

Perhaps it is possible to redeem Afrocentrism from its modern misuse by racists, anti-Semites, and pseudo-intellectuals. Perhaps not. I am certain of one thing. Afrocentrism, in its most disturbing and extremist forms, is a charismatic, not an intellectual movement. It is a born-again, true-believer type of enthusiasm, similar to creation science and rationalized with the same sort of evangelical passion. It is not likely to be stopped by intellectual arguments or politically correct dogmas from the right or from the left.

Africa and the Afrocentrists

by Louis Wilson

Many Afrocentrists tend to look at Africa as the starting point of their movement. This is at best a difficult place to begin since these scholars are not Africanists. Hence, this raises a rather large problem that most Afrocentrists either try to avoid or simply ignore: Despite countless claims to the contrary, the Afrocentric idea does not hail from Africa. Traditionally, Africans don't share any innate sense of African unity, be it ethnic, linguistic, religious, or biological.

The word "African" is not even indigenous to Africa. It's an external term with an external definition. It actually has Latin roots. (To the Greeks, they were "Ethiopians"—see *Blacks in Antiquity* by Frank Snowden, Jr.). Whenever we talk about "Africans" and use the term "Afrocentrism," we must keep in mind that these terms are not even native to the continent.

So how did the people living in Africa view themselves? They mainly saw themselves as members of particular cultural groups. Many cultural groups in Africa differentiated themselves by language—the Egyptians, the Yoruba, the Akan, the Kamba, the Tiv, the Ga, the Zulu, and thousands of others each spoke a different tongue. Geography and environment also affect culture, so it's more than just language that separated these people. The forest civilizations differed from the river civilizations, which in turn differed from the desert cultures. Africa is linguistically and culturally the most diverse continent on the planet. Only when the Europeans arrived on the scene in great numbers did these diverse peo-

ples begin to think of themselves as "Africans."

The Krobo of West Africa, an Adangme-speaking people, provide a good example of how Africans have traditionally viewed their own communities. I've studied the Krobo since 1971, living among them for stretches of time and looking very closely at the question of community. How does one join the Krobo, how does one become a Krobo? It didn't matter that everybody involved in the transaction was "African." Those who entered Krobo society from outside had to transform. If you were from the Akan, you would need to abandon your Akan heritage and become Króbo. You had to give up your language, your religion, your dietary habits. The Akan people themselves did essentially the same thing—they were inclusive, but they also demanded accommodation.

West Africa has played home to several large empires over time, and nobody has ever constructed an empire out of mutual understanding. The Akan created their empire as a result of military expansion, which was rooted in political and economic accomplishments. The same is true of the ancient empires of Mali and Ghana. When we consider the achievements of the ancient African empires, we need to keep these tensions in mind. There were Asante and anti-Asante people who resented the Asante's domination. Shaka and the Zulu rose to prominence because they were able to dominate their immediate neighbors. Consider also the rise of Fulani over the Hausa and other people in the Sudan.

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When colonial rule eventually came to the continent, the Africans in West Africa, North Africa, and Southern Africa did not rise up as a unified nation. It didn't happen with the Atlantic slave trade, either. The Akans saw themselves as Akan, the Krobo saw themselves as Krobo. Most had no problem in selling other people into slavery. That's not a moral statement, that's history.

Similarly, when colonial rule came to Egypt—the land revered by Afrocentrists as the pinnacle of African cultural development—other African nations did not join together in opposition. The occupation didn't affect them directly, so

they by and large let it stand. Many of them didn't even know about it. When independence finally did come to various African nations in the 1950s and 1960s, each nation responded to its own unique circumstances. Ghana had its particular needs, Nigeria had its own concerns, and Kenya had its special problems.

If Afrocentrism even exists in Ghana, Nigeria, or Kenya, it is of minor importance. Afrocentrism comes from the United States. It has no African foundation. This doesn't mean to say that no cultural or linguistic artifacts from Africa found their way to the United States. But it does suggest that we should understand where these artifacts come from, and why none of them is associated with any kind of African unity.

The Origins of the "Stolen Legacy"

by Mary Lefkowitz

If the Afrocentrists have a best-seller, it's surely *Stolen Legacy*, by George G. M. James. The message of *Stolen Legacy*, first published in 1954, is sensational and revolutionary: "the Greeks were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the Black people of North Africa, the Egyptians." Anyone who has studied ancient Mediterranean history will realize immediately that these claims are not true. But to anyone unfamiliar with Egyptian or Greek history, or the works of the Greek philosophers, James's argument seems coherent and plausible, given its scholarly layout and frequent reference to ancient source materials and modern studies.

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James's basic premise is that Greek philosophy is based directly on an "Egyptian Mystery System," which Greek philosophers allegedly copied after they studied in Egypt. In reality, however, the very notion of an Egyptian Mystery System is a relatively modern fiction based on several non-Egyptian ancient sources. How these fundamentally Greek practices came to be understood as originally Egyptian is a fascinating story.

The earliest description of "mysteries" (i.e., initiation rituals) and academies for Egyptian priests, with large libraries and art galleries, first occurs not in any ancient text, but in a 1732 French novel: *Séthos*, by Abbé Jean Terrasson. The novel was widely read and heavily influenced later portrayals of Egyptian religion, as in Mozart's, *The Magic Flute*. In particular, the initiation of Terrasson's hero into the Egyptian priesthood served as the inspiration for many Ma-

sonic rituals. The Masons regarded their rituals, established in the 18th century, as both ancient and Egyptian when in fact they were neither. All authentic information about early Egyptian religion was inaccessible to them, mainly because the documents describing them could not yet be read. Like Mozart, James seems to have been inspired by Masonic ritual; he speaks of Mason-like "Grand Lodges" in Egypt and cites Masonic literature. His visions of a racially black Egypt are in fact unique to African American Masons, who claim descent from ancient black Egyptians.

The "Egyptian" rituals described by Terrasson and his Freemason followers were actually taken from Greek and Latin literature. The Egyptian goddess Isis, for example, assumes a particular importance in his work, as well as in works derived from it, such as Mozart's *Thamos, King of Egypt* and *The Magic Flute*. But the portrayal of Isis and her cult is clearly Greco-Roman in character. The 12-day initiation into the Mysteries of Isis is primarily based not on an Egyptian source, but on the description of the hero Aeneas's visit to the underworld in the Roman poet Virgil's *Aeneid*, written in the first century B.C. Terrasson also relies heavily on Apuleius's account of his initiation to the Roman cult of Isis in his second-century Latin novel *The Golden Ass*.

With the translation of the Rosetta Stone in 1836, new information about Egypt suddenly became available. The Masons didn't use the occasion to revise their rituals and sense of history, but neither did they lay claim to serious scholarship. James, on the other hand, purports to have written an academic book; he ought to have taken recent discoveries into consideration. He nonetheless refuses to concentrate on what is known about Egyptian myth and ritual and cites *Anacalypsis* (or "Revelation") by Godfrey Higgins, who died three years before Jean François Champollion definitively deciphered the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Higgins argues vigorously against Champollion's early work and even calls the Rosetta Stone a forgery. Higgins was, of course, completely wrong. James certainly knew of Champollion, but his

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reference to Higgins rather than a more authoritative and modern source demonstrates the hostility he bears toward Greek civilization.

Higgins argued (in vain) that Egyptian writing could never be deciphered because it was a secret system. In *Stolen Legacy*, James likewise insists that no records of the Egyptian Mystery System have come down to us in any language because it was secret. Because it would not suit his purpose, James neglects to mention the other and more obvious explanation for the absence of records, which is, of course, that no such system ever existed. As we have seen, the rituals that late ancient writers identified as Egyptian are basically Greek; these ersatz Egyptian rituals served as models for the impressive "Egyptian" rituals described by the French author Terrasson; and Terrasson helped inspire the Masons. Thus, most ironically, the Egyptian Mystery System described by James is not African, but essentially Greek, and in its details, specifically European.

In order to prove that Greek philosophy was based on Egyptian philosophy, James must show how it came to Greece from Egypt. Here he can draw some limited support from ancient Greek sources claiming that certain important Greek philosophers studied in Egypt. Since other philosophers studied in Egypt (though ancient writers don't explain what they learned there), James insists that Socrates and Aristotle must also have gone there, even though no ancient writer says so. James argues that silence about Socrates's and Aristotle's presence in Egypt is proof of a conspiracy by the Greeks to conceal from posterity the extent of their debt. The same evidence of silence, of course, has led other scholars to the natural conclusion that neither of them actually ever went there. In fact, Plato, a close contemporary, says that Socrates never traveled outside of Athens unless he was on military campaign in Greece.

If the Greek philosophers had stolen their ideas from the Egyptians, as James asserts, we would expect him to provide parallel texts that clearly demonstrate a theft. But James

manages only to point to some general similarities between Egyptian religious ideas and Greek theories. Aristotle wrote a treatise *On the Soul*, and the Egyptians believed in the immortality of the soul, James writes. But the similarity ends there. James admits that no close resemblance exists, since Aristotle's theory is only a "very small portion" of the Egyptian "philosophy" of the soul, as described in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. But anyone who examines the Book of the Dead will see that it isn't a philosophical treatise at all, but rather a series of ritual prescriptions to ensure the soul's passage to the next world. Nothing could be more different from Aristotle's abstract consideration of the nature of the soul.

Many more examples of *Stolen Legacy*'s fraudulence exist: For instance, James insists that the Greeks did not win their wars against Persia in 490 and 480-79 B.C., as has always been thought, but states (in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary) that the battles of Marathon and Salamis were indecisive. James misrepresents history in this way in order to depict the ancient Greeks as a quarrelsome and chaotic people incapable of producing philosophy, which, according to James, "requires an environment which is free from disturbance and worries." Such misinformation entitles *Stolen Legacy* to a place on the shelf with other hate literature, such as *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*. But it also deserves to be rated as one of the most successful, and (alas) influential "myths" in recent history. And it is distinctly frightening that schoolchildren are being taught to believe that this myth is true.

The Distortions of Afrocentric History

by Clarence E. Walker

Afrocentrism is not the first attempt by blacks in the United States to reinvent themselves. Black people adopted the "new Negro" trope in the 1920s to break away from a painful past. In the 1960s and 1970s, we abandoned "Negro" to become "black" or "Afro-American." Today, many would have us call ourselves "African American." These constant name changes suggest that the history of the Negro in North America involves a belief that such cosmetic alterations not only confer pride, but also refashion reality. Afrocentrism, for its part, tries to rewrite history. But as a form of historical revisionism, it's entirely bankrupt. It's nothing more than a series of tendentious assertions rooted in black cultural nationalism.

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As a form of historical explanation, Afrocentrism is what French economist François Simiand once called "the chronological idol ... the habit of losing oneself in studies of origin." Although modern historical scholarship has moved beyond this preoccupation, self-styled Afrocentric scholars take it to new heights of narcissism. They almost single-mindedly set out to claim ancient Egypt as a "black" civilization. Then they try to trace the origins of various inventions, art forms, and philosophical developments to Egypt. This way, they think, modern-day blacks can take pride in the world's glories.

But focusing on "who did what first" reveals very little about ancient Egypt, or any other society. What, for exam-

This essay is adapted from the 1993 volume of Prospects.

ple, were the nature of social relations in the Old and New Kingdoms of Egypt? How did the common people relate to the Pharaoh and his court? Was ancient Egypt a slave-based society? If so, what role did slaves play in the production of wealth? How did ancient Egyptians construct gender? At what age did people marry? These are the questions that interest professional historians, and they lie at the heart of recent historical inquiries into ancient Egypt. But they are not part of the race-obsessed Afrocentric enterprise.

Afrocentrists focus on elites. They purport to study the values and pretensions of hegemonic groups. But this top-down history is inaccurate. It gives a distorted picture of the past, since societies contain much more than kings and queens and their accomplishments. It ignores the vast majority of people who lived in, and created, a culture.

This concentration on rulers constitutes a return to an older mode of black historical analysis called "contributionism." As an effort on the part of an earlier generation of black historians to include their people in the history of the West and North America, the contributionists tried to correct the notion that black people come out of a historical void. Today's Afrocentrists say that they are doing the same thing—that is, showing that black people throughout history were more than hewers of wood and drawers of water. Afrocentrist Ron Karenga calls on white people "to recognize the cultural and historical richness of African civilization and its contributions to history" and to acknowledge that Africa was "the paragon of human society." The contributionists were not quite this bold in their claims, but they tried to identify many individual citizens of the ancient world as racially black. Robert B. Lewis, for instance, cited Moses, Hannibal, Cicero, Pompey, Scipio Africanus, and others as black. The Afrocentrists build upon the contributionist approach, laying claim to whole categories of human achievement rather than just a group of distinguished individuals.

Quite apart from the exaggeration of some of these claims, something is wrong here. On the one hand,

Afrocentrists say that Africa led the way in many of the areas that traditional scholars have designated collectively as "civilization." At the same time, however, they profess to condemn this model of civilization, exalting the richness of cultures whose values and achievements lie elsewhere. How can they simultaneously reject the European model of "civilization" and claim, within the European context, some kind of superiority over it? Prominent Afrocentrists like Molefi Kete Asante, Wade Nobles, and Leonard Jeffries say that they use a new methodology, but Afrocentrism actually fails to transcend European categories of race, class, and culture. Their tools of social analysis are Western, not African. Like the contributionists, they borrow freely from the old Eurocentric canon. The very notion of a "classical civilization" is a Western idea, for instance. Ultimately, Afrocentrism is Eurocentrism in blackface. It repeats what it sets out to repudiate.

The Afrocentrists also like to claim that Africans possess a special nature. African values, they say, emphasize the community over the individual and spiritualism over materialism. Such grand claims completely ignore the size and diversity of the African continent in order to cultivate an Edenic myth. Africans, in this view, lived in harmony with each other before the rise of European expansionism. But this is racial Romanticism, a rehash of Edward Wilmot Blyden and Leopold Senghor's "Negritude" movement. Africans, of course, don't have any special nature that other people lack. Besides, if African sensibilities were significantly different from those of the Europeans, then why did the ancient Egyptians prey upon weaker black societies for slaves? Why did the supposedly non-materialistic Africans of a later era sell as many as 11 million of their peers to white slave traders?

The Afrocentric denial that Africans played any kind of role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade creates an unacceptable gap in Afrocentric historical analysis. Any historical understanding of black Americans today must begin with an examination of the role slavery played in shaping U.S. history. The Afrocentric obsession with ancient Egypt is a form of psy-

chological evasion.

But then again, Afrocentrism evades the real issues facing today's black Americans. Will Afrocentrism fix the plight of the urban underclass? Will it keep black families together? Will it halt gang violence? Will it encourage high school students to stay in school? Will it provide jobs? It won't do any of these things, of course. The most pressing problems facing the black community today have very little to do with a faulty knowledge of history or low group self-esteem. What black people need today is a usable present, not a usable past. Unfortunately, Afrocentrism offers neither.

What's Wrong With the Portland Baseline Essays?

by Erich Martel

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Teachers who want reliable information on African and African American history often don't know where to turn. Many have unfortunately looked to unreliable books and publications by Afrocentric writers. The African American Baseline Essays, developed by the school system in Portland, Oregon, are the most widespread Afrocentric teacher resources. Educators should be aware of their crippling flaws.

The essays divide into six separate sections, each trying to detail African and African American contributions to art, history, the language arts, math, music, and science. They might as well be called "Egypt-centric," however, since so much of their content revolves around ancient Egypt. Openly disdainful of professional Egyptologists, most of the authors attempt major revisions of ancient Egyptian history. Although they claim to advance long ignored facts and to correct Eurocentric distortions of history, many of their claims and theories turn out to be little more than "Africanized" versions of discredited and discarded European ideas.

A 19th century conception of race binds the essays together. They try to portray all Africans across thousands of years and miles as part of a single "race" and culture simply on

A more detailed critique of the Portland Baseline Essays is available by writing Erich Martel at Wilson High School, Washington, D.C. 20016.

the basis of a few observable physical features, such as skin color and hair form. According to Philip Curtin, a professor of African history at Johns Hopkins University, "The fundamental problem is that [the social studies essay] puts forward racial theories that have been long ago abandoned by mainline scholars of Africa."

Despite this, the essays' many inaccuracies have gained a foothold in a number of school districts. Two widely reported distortions are that ancient Egypt was a black nation and that Cleopatra was black.

■ **"Ancient Egypt was a black nation" or Egypt was "The Land of the Blacks," claim the essays on art and music.**

"Black" and "white" are hard to define. Ancient Egyptian and Greek views of skin color were not the products of a legacy of racial discrimination, as they are in the modern U.S. According to Frank J. Yurco, an Egyptologist at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, these terms are simply a "chimera—cultural baggage from our own society that can only be imposed artificially on ancient Egyptian society." Moreover, Yurco points to studies in physical anthropology and ancient Egyptian art that suggest the ancient Egyptians "were of varying complexions of color, from the light Mediterranean type (like Queen Nefertiti), to the light brown of Middle Egypt, to the darker brown of Upper Egypt, to the darkest shade around Aswan and the First Cataract region, where even today, the population shifts to Nubian."

The phrase "Land of the Blacks" is a mistranslation of the ancient Egyptian word "KMT" (Kemet). It means "the black land," and refers to the black alluvial soil deposited by the Nile's yearly flooding, not the skin color of nearby residents. "KMT" contrasts the word "Deshret," or "the red land," which refers to the surrounding desert. The ancient Egyptians, who owed their lives to the Nile and the soil it made rich, often called themselves "the people of the black land."

■ **The famous Ptolemaic queen "Cleopatra VII ... was of mixed African and Greek parentage. ... She was not fully a Greek," says the section on social studies.**

For proof of this claim, the author cites Shakespeare, who "calls [Cleopatra] 'tawny'" in one of his plays.

Frank Snowden, Jr., a professor emeritus of classics at Howard University, says that Cleopatra "is well attested on coins that depict the Ptolemaic queen as white." Yurco adds that members of the Ptolemaic dynasty, which was Macedonian and came to Egypt with Alexander's conquest, were "so concerned to retain its Greek purity that they engaged regularly in brother-sister marriages. ... Though you cannot prove that Cleopatra VII had no indigenous Egyptian admixture, the probability is that she did not."

Other problems with the Portland essays run much deeper. Worldwide phenomena such as pentatonic scale in music, use of prophecy, body language, creation stories, rock art, as well as the earliest pottery, sculpture, and musical instruments are often described as if they originated in Africa. Features that might be considered unique to Africa, such as trickster stories, are not highlighted at all.

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The "Science and Technology" essay endorses pseudo-scientific notions, including "the extra-terrestrial origin of the Nile" and "water-laden micro-comets" as the source of the oceans. The author misinterprets a small bird effigy in the Cairo Museum as a model of a glider and writes that ancient Egyptians developed full-sized gliders 4,000 years ago and "used their early planes for travel expeditions and recreation." He attributes mystical powers to the pyramids and misinterprets artifacts in trying to show that the ancient Egyptians experimented with antennae and electricity. He also makes the startling claim that "for the ancient Egyptians as well as contemporary Africans worldwide, there is no distinction and thus no separation between science and religion."

Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, a professor of anthropology at Wayne State University in Detroit, comments that "the 'science' that the essay describes is pseudo science—a

farrago of unsubstantiated and outrageous claims, arguments for the existence of the paranormal, and advocacy of the supernatural as an integral part of science." Writing in the *Phi Delta Kappan*, Irving Klotz, professor emeritus of chemistry at Northwestern University, notes that "[t]he most devastating effect of the spread of this kind of material taught in the Portland Baseline Essays will be the inculcation in a generation of young people of an uncritical, superficial attitude toward science."

Even the portion of the essay devoted to African American scientists contains easily avoided inaccuracies. The essay states that "Thomas Jefferson appointed Benjamin Banneker to survey the site for the capital, Washington, D.C." and that Banneker "wrote a proposal for the establishment of a United States Department of Peace." Had the author consulted *The Life of Benjamin Banneker* by Silvio Bedini, which is considered the definitive biography, he would have discovered no evidence for these claims. Jefferson appointed Andrew Ellicott to conduct the survey; Ellicott made Banneker his assistant for roughly three months in 1791. Benjamin Rush authored the "Department of Peace" proposal; the confusion arose among earlier biographers because the proposal appeared in Banneker's 1793 almanac.

Another telling inaccuracy lies in repeating the widely circulated rumor that Dr. Charles Drew, who pioneered blood plasma storage, died after an auto accident because "not one of several nearby white hospitals would provide the blood transfusions he so desperately needed." The 1972 *Dictionary of Negro Biography*, however, says that "Conflicting versions to the contrary, Drew received prompt medical attention."

At best, the essays' errors demonstrate a severe amount of sloppiness; at worst, they reveal an ideologically-driven willingness to prefer the claims of non-specialists over the documented research of trained professionals. The most flagrant example of this is the author of the science essay. Although credited as a "research scientist" at Argonne National Laboratories, he turns out to be an industrial

hygiene technician with a high school diploma.

The Portland Baseline Essays *do* contain some accurate information. The math essay's coverage of ancient Egypt includes a good deal of reliable information. The art, language arts, and music essays, despite many errors in their coverage of ancient Egypt, appear to treat their African American sections accurately. Nevertheless, the essays as a whole are seriously flawed.

Many schools still need to update their curricula on Africa and the African American experience, but those that look to Portland for help face an impossible task: how to find reliable information among the specious. The real solution is for teachers to stay informed of developments in their fields of study. They should read professional journals, attend conferences, and establish links to local universities and museums. They should argue among themselves in faculty lounges. They should remain open to new ideas, but always skeptical of dramatic and revisionist claims. While modern views of the past constantly change as new data emerge and new interpretations come forth, all of us should employ caution when confronted by claims purporting to reveal a "real truth" that sweeps away well-documented information about the past.

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Afrocentrism in the Textbooks

by Gilbert T. Sewall

The discourse on American history promises to continue to be as vitriolic as ever. Nationally, we have a hard time talking about what we have in common, what we should do in classrooms, what teachers should convey, and what textbooks should contain. I'm interested primarily in the latter, that is, what happens when the editors decide on the content of textbooks. In the vast majority of U.S. classrooms, the textbook is the essential instrument of teaching. Highly respected and economical, the textbook is the pivot around which classroom conversation turns. In the 1990s, the textbook has been a primary battleground in the struggle over American history, and although explicit Afrocentrism has not won widespread acceptance, its influence has been pervasive and troublesome.

In 1990, the state of California adopted a new set of history textbooks for use in kindergarten through eighth-grade classrooms. California, like Texas and other large states, has an extraordinary power to shape the textbook market because of its size and because of what textbook publishers do for the state. Once a publisher has sold a textbook in a large state, the publisher then tries to sell it in smaller states and localities around the nation. California is an enormous textbook market: Each grade level has an enrollment of about 400,000 students. So when California undertook this landmark adoption, Houghton Mifflin designed a textbook series to try to meet the standards of the California curriculum framework. That 1988 framework, crafted under the direc-

tion of then-Superintendent Bill Honig, was taken by most discerning educators across the political spectrum to strike a responsible balance, to represent what multiculturalism could do with enlightened state leadership. The textbook adoption seemed to show that states could act both decisively and effectively in behalf of curriculum reform.

The overseeing editor of the text was Gary Nash of UCLA, later to become better known for his controversial architecture of the proposed National History Standards. Nash and his co-authors brought into these textbooks a great deal of African and African-American history. The slave trade and plantation life were dealt with explicitly and at length. But the books were attacked not only by Afrocentrists but by Moslems, the Christian Right, and gay radicals. These four groups, which heretofore had not been particularly prominent in discussions of history and history textbooks, were at the center of the protest, which became so unpleasant that by the second state hearing police had to be called in to calm the crowds.

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What didn't the Afrocentrists like? They didn't like what they took to be a Eurocentric, monocultural approach to history. (At the time, "Eurocentric" and "monocultural" were relatively new terms.) The Afrocentrists wanted a bolder and, they said, less biased view of African-American history, claiming that the books were "slanted, racist, and wrong," designed by "European people," and that they contributed to a "mental holocaust" for black students.

The following year, Afrocentrism became a news item. The city of Portland, Oregon, had, some time earlier, published a series of essays that laid out an Afrocentric curriculum across subjects. By 1991, this curriculum had generated considerable attention. Suddenly Portland was selling thousands of copies of this series, and around the nation the "Portland essays" were becoming a touchstone of Afrocentrism.

Reputable historians dismissed the Portland essays as fanciful, and overwhelming historical evidence contradicted

Afrocentric "fact." But these professional critiques did not persuade many black educators, who took them to be evidence of lingering structural racism in the curriculum. Indeed, at this time, Afrocentrism was developing into something close to a system of belief and ethnic religion. We should not discount the role of sympathetic or credulous journalists in helping to create this phenomenon. When the spotlight of media attention fastened on Afrocentrism, one reporter and editorialist after another decided to write about the Portland essays and the Afrocentric movement in schools. Very few of these journalists were trained historians. They welcomed "new" or "multiple" perspectives uncritically, including points of view that Afrocentrists said had been covered up by traditional "white" history.

Today, five years later, media interest in Afrocentrism has faded substantially. Inquiries into Afrocentric programs have virtually halted, and adoption of the Portland essays and other Afrocentric curricula has slowed to a few predominantly black districts. Some explicitly Afrocentric schools have sprung up in urban centers around the nation. The movement has influenced many more schools in black neighborhoods, such as Prince George's County, Maryland.

Meanwhile, American mass-market textbooks have adopted a more "mainstream" version of Afrocentrism's historical analysis, one that is not explicitly Afrocentric but which shares many of the methodological faults of Afrocentrism. Scholastic standards have been changed. Diversity, inclusion, and group consciousness drive textbook content and narrative. For the last 25 years, race and gender rights have tended to replace political, diplomatic, military, and economic history as animating themes in classrooms. Misguided efforts to advance student self-esteem and "identity" in examining the past corrupt the subject of history.

One typical example of this is a textbook called *Exploring American History*, published by Globe, a subsidiary of Simon & Schuster. *Exploring American History* is what's called an "easy reader." Unlike most textbooks that go for a

broader audience, it's targeted toward urban audiences. Even a quick look at this textbook is enough to see that it's objectionable for many reasons other than its treatment of black America. The writing is dreadful. The text is extremely hard to track as it moves almost capriciously from one subject to another. It's a very, very bad textbook. Only the rudiments and the barest material are presented, and that so incomprehensibly that students with limited reading skills will be lost. It's a scandal that such a book is targeted toward inner-city school districts.

In the section titled "An Industrial Nation," the book attempts to give an overview of the Industrial Revolution in the United States in only two and a half pages. In this very brief and curious treatment of the Industrial Revolution, one figure stands out: Jan Matzeliger, who invented a shoe-making machine in the late 19th century. His story takes up a sizable share of the text's entire coverage of the Industrial Revolution, and he's there for one reason only. He's black. This is what we used to call "tokenism," but it now might better be called "soft Afrocentrism" or "inclusion." Moreover, we find out that, because he sold the patent for his machine, he received only a small share of the profits from it. It is a motif that runs through this and similar books—and comes through repeatedly like a drumbeat—that black people in American history have been universally oppressed, undercompensated, and shortchanged.

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An up-to-date history textbook like *Exploring American History* accommodates, seeking to add plenty of "role models" and to reshuffle history. Texts are "inclusive," and they reflect the popular concept of cultural equivalency in the examination of the nation and world. These texts and their creators are extremely sensitive to numerous groups and themes, and no group more than blacks and no theme more than race. Many black educators want to alert black students to social injustices and victimization, and in the process of doing so they are willing to write themselves and their race out of a larger American identity. As anti-historical and divisive cur-

riculum movements such as Afrocentrism attain the power to shape textbook content, history texts that transcend race, ethnicity, gender, and ascriptive condition will vanish, at great peril to tomorrow's understanding of the nation and world.

A Teacher's Look at Afrocentrism

by Rosalind Johnson

A society must impart rules, rituals, and beliefs to its youth if it intends to survive for more than a single generation. How our society fulfills this mission is now at the center of heated debate: whose rules? whose rituals? whose beliefs? As our country moves away from the 19th century's cookie-cutter conception of mass schooling and heads toward the high-tech and multiethnic 21st century, we must redefine our educational goals. We still intend to deliver an education to all of our country's children, but how we do it remains an open question.

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The education debate never really goes away; it just changes topics. Many years ago, controversy swirled around compulsory attendance and teaching evolution theory. Today, the arguments rage over multicultural and Afrocentric curricula. At stake is the ultimate cultural prize: the education of our children.

Virtually all of us can agree that American schools desperately needed systemic change yesterday. But as a practicing teacher for 26 years, I know that the curricular combatants have had little to no effect on America's classrooms. In order to achieve desirable change, we must calmly focus ourselves on a handful of basic principles that most Americans will find acceptable. We must convey a proper sense of the United States, its history, and its place in the world. A school curriculum that ignores the diverse peoples of the world cannot produce a tolerant or learned citizenry for the next century's toughest challenges.

The United States is the only country both fortunate and plagued at the same time to have citizens who hail from nearly every ethnic stock on the globe. The survival of the American experiment requires that we continue to balance the delicate demands of this fragile pluralism. Many educators now suggest that black children, who face a unique set of obstacles, retreat into the racial enclave of Afrocentrism. But Afrocentrism is no magic bullet. It risks balkanizing our children—and ultimately our nation.

I'm the child of many ethnicities. My mother is a Choctaw Indian from Oklahoma. My great-grandmother is the child of a black slave and a white slave owner. What curriculum is best for me? I was educated in the public schools of Prince George's County, Maryland. We used the hand-me-down textbooks of white students. I read the European classics of Dante, Goethe, Shakespeare, Bacon, and Cervantes. I read the American classics of Hawthorne, Dickinson, and Whitman. My textbooks taught me next to nothing about African Americans, aside from the institution of slavery.

While in college, I gained a broader view of black people and their significant role in the world. I also acquired a greater knowledge of other cultures. I don't claim to have a deep academic understanding of my many heritages, but neither do I condemn my early education as invalid. I still make use of what I learned in those old textbooks. As a woman of African heritage, I feel revulsion over slavery and its sordid legacy. But I don't revile my own existence. I'm an American. I'm proud of my multiple ethnic heritages. I'm proud of my citizenship. My Eurocentric education, as it's called these days, made me literate and tolerant of new ideas and human differences. This is the type of education I strive to give to my students.

I've observed several Afrocentric programs and read about many more. Most have flopped, but a few have prospered. Whenever the children succeed in these programs, it's typically because the classes are smaller, the parents are more

involved, and the teachers have aides. The children are gently prodded to explore the unknown. They don't fear failure. Any child would soar in this type of environment.

But Afrocentrism tries to do more than provide a safe learning environment. Some of the children will graduate from these programs with a lousy education. They might come away thinking that the continent of Africa was and is a monolithic society, rather than a place where millions of people speak thousands of dialects and live in both conflict and harmony.

I worry that Afrocentric curricula promote fantasy as fact. I worry that its children learn to feel self-worth by denying any worth to other cultural groups. I worry that these children won't value the cultural diversity of their own country, let alone the world. I worry that they will feel no comfort living and working outside of the black experience. I worry that they will grow up intolerant.

Many Afrocentrists argue that black children learn differently than white, Hispanic, or Asian children, and that they need a different kind of education for this reason. But if this is the basis of Afrocentrism, then I think it's seriously flawed. I've never seen any empirical evidence to suggest that the children of different races learn differently. When I began my teaching career in Prince George's County in 1968, 99 percent of my students were white. Today, 89 percent are African American. They do not learn differently.

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What I see in my students are the effects of economic stress, a lack of family stability, and little or no parental involvement. I see students who don't have hopes or a vision for the future. They have no expectations beyond instant gratification.

My students need to believe that they can achieve. My students must learn to function well enough to survive and prosper in a bustling world economy. My students must see themselves as members of a global village—not an African village. As their teacher, I must help them learn to read, write, and compute, to understand the country and world they will inherit, and to have goals to aim for and conquer.

The Racial Idiocy of Afrocentrism

by Michael Meyers

Under Afrocentrism, intellectuals need not be boring anymore. Afrocentrist intellectuals only need to know how to rap, how to rhyme, and how to emote. They are like preachers in this regard, and that's what they are doing: preaching, as well as singing the siren song of separatism and nationalism. These individuals' fixations with dogmatism and victimization are not qualities of the mind but handicaps to clear thinking and freedom as we have come to understand and value these concepts. Before Afrocentrism, hollering and emoting used to be done in church and maybe in the home, but certainly not in the classroom, the textbooks, or the library, where the mind must be able to hear and read complex and conflicting ideas.

Gerald Early wrote in *Civilization* magazine that Afrocentrism is an intellectual movement, "a political view, a historically traceable evolution, and a religious orthodoxy...." If Afrocentrism had only been developed by whites, many might have dismissed it by now as a "European plot," as a web of condescension placed around black Americans in order to divert them and ensnare them into a pit of diversionary rhetoric and introspective babble.

I wish I had thought of this sooner. If, decades ago, I had thought of convincing people that Afrocentrism was a European idea and dangerous to blacks, I might have singlehandedly stopped the Afrocentric movement, and a conference or a publication about the dangers of Afrocentrism would not have been necessary or relevant. Gerald Early

might even have written about my theory in *Civilization*—using virtually the same words that he uses to describe Louis Farrakhan, as a man who "especially exploits the idea that he is a heroic black man at grave risk for daring to tell the truth about the white man."

But Afrocentrism, of course, is not "the white man's" invention, and that makes a black's criticism of it the more necessary. I think it is so in part because Afrocentrism has caught on in black America. In my experience, it has become mainstream; it's everywhere. It is seen or heard at NAACP meetings, on black talk-radio stations, in the black-owned press, even in some black churches where a Caucasian Jesus has been replaced with a black or "African American" Jesus. Afrocentrism has infected the American body politic in voting and redistricting schemes, and of course it is prevalent on many campuses, where ethnic diversity seems to be the only thing the campus populations say they have in common.

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The Afrocentric movement has been building. Earlier, black Americans who identified with their alleged African roots flocked to Marcus Garvey. The Garveyites were Afrocentrists before the term was coined, perhaps. I have often criticized Afrocentrism as a "political drum" movement, with everybody marching in step to the same beat. Well, the Garveyites quite literally had and beat their drums. They also had trumpets and plumes, and they built up a significant grassroots following. Historians recount how Garvey had established his own black church, complete with a black Holy Trinity, a black Christ, and a black Madonna. These are the historical antecedents to the modern-day Afrocentrism that has attracted youths on campuses and adults in ghettoes across America.

My first confrontation with Afrocentrism came in 1966 or 1967, when I was a high school student. I was one of a class of 50 blacks from Harlem who had integrated William Howard Taft High School, located in a then mostly-white section of the Bronx. Some black activists suggested adding Swahili as a language to be studied in the curriculum. I rec-

ollect that it was the Congress of Racial Equality that then championed this awful idea. I also recall that the initiative was welcomed by the school's white principal. Swahili was, of course, to be added as a benefit for black students. Other students, including myself—because I was not interested in negritude—took French and Spanish as foreign languages.

I opposed the adding of Swahili because it was part of a movement to racialize and ghettoize the curriculum. But the supporters of high school Swahili said that it was to be a life-affirming experience for blacks, to ensure that blacks were properly recognized and included in the curriculum. And Swahili was heralded as the black African's language. French and English were not regarded then as African languages, not because they were not spoken in parts of Africa but because they were not the indigenous language of black Africans. Swahili, it was said, was an authentic black African language, and black Americans needed to identify with Africa, because all other Americans had a country to look back to and identify with. Blacks got an entire continent to make up for their lost heritage.

Around this time in the 1960s, we had the black revolution in New York public education, including concepts like community control of schools. At first, Swahili and other changes in the curriculum were offered as inducements to integration, but in a short time "liberation" became the rallying cry. Blacks themselves were to interpret the so-called black experience. Negritude became an end in itself—particularly as the importance of integration waned, and it became "impractical," as a consequence of white flight and black retrogression and retreat into separatism. Under the guise of redefining or authenticating the black experience, Negro/Black History Week became an integral part of the school culture. Today it is African-American History Month. In some locales it is considered essential for elementary and junior high school students to know the Nguzo Saba—the seven principles, a ritual made up by a black academic, as a way to value and perpetuate "the race" through unity, self-

determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and "imani"—faith. For Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, South Americans, and all the rest from Spain, there is Hispanic Heritage Month.

Much of this racial and cultural identity has been reinforced at colleges and universities where new programs and new faculty and staff to run them have balkanized the academy. Political scientist Leonard Jeffries, as I recall, not having first published a book, got tenure as a professor, and became chair of the Black Studies Department at City College in New York. And the rest is history. *Of course*, academic standards slipped with the introduction of "black studies."

By definition, whites could not validate or propagate the black experience. Because it was a "black thing," whites could not understand it. So, at my college, for example, you got such things as "black karate." Not *black-belt* karate, but *black* karate. At other colleges there were classes on "black English," "black psychology," and the catch-all—"black studies"—which covers everything "African" and "African-American." Thus, scholarship was reduced, with religious fervor, to a color. In schools and colleges, race, to paraphrase Henry Louis Gates Jr., became "the most important thing" about people.

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I have no truck for or identification with whatever blackness is. Whether it's "black English" or "black talk" or black this or black that, it's all racial idiocy. It's all racial nonsense. In a word, it's *bunk*. To quote an old saying, "I have no time for negritude...." But this bunk is passed on to black children as the absolute gospel, as necessary and important to building self-esteem. And, of course, "self" is always defined in terms of race. This is the measure of what I call the *idiocracy* that grips American institutions, on its campuses and in its schools, from first grade through graduate school. If the pursuit of knowledge upsets some, "make the student feel comfortable" is the mantra; place him at the center of his own universe of cultural knowledge. What utter nonsense.

An article in the August/September 1995 issue of *Crisis*

magazine quotes Tiger Woods, a sophomore golfer at Stanford University. He's the reigning U.S. amateur golfer, and according to the article he "chooses not to have a race or color preference." He has volunteered, "I am one-quarter black, one-quarter Chinese, one-quarter Thai, one-eighth American Indian and one-eighth white." The article says: "To refer to himself as just one of these races, he contends, is to negate the others. For Woods, 'golf is all that matters.'" Afrocentrists might say that Woods doesn't understand his identity—after all, he plays a "white sport." That's the kind of language and stereotyping we have fallen into in America: Golf is "white," basketball is "black."

The tragedy of the racial approach to education is that it is built upon the quicksands of stereotype, condescension, and paternalism. If some blacks do not speak or know standard English, tell them that broken English is fine, that it's a racial or cultural dialect. If major universities and colleges relax standards in faculty or staff hiring, tell them it's OK just to hire blacks as "role models" or to teach the new college population the fundamentals of racial pride and identification. This is liberal racism. Call it "black studies," call it "black politics," call it "black psychology," call it "black religion," call it "black culture," but don't call it what it is: misguided liberal claptrap. If you do, and you are black, you'll be ridden out of the race by Africanists and ignored or castigated by their white sympathizers. That is the measure and tenacity of the cult of idiocracy that has taken hold of America on its campuses and in its schools. It is an idiocracy to which intellectuals must object.

The Need for Myths

by David Nicholson

The recent fuss over Afrocentrism doesn't come from nowhere. Certain realities of black urban life in the 1980s and 1990s help explain the rise of Afrocentrism. Incompetent teachers and substandard schools, drugs and violence, out-of-wedlock pregnancies and gangs that offer boys their only chance at a sense of belonging—these are all reasons why parents and teachers in Washington, Portland, Detroit, Atlanta, and many other cities want to see an Afrocentric curriculum in their schools.

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Perhaps more important, Afrocentrism fulfills a deep need for myths among black Americans. With all their teachings about black Egyptians building a glorious civilization, the proud kingdoms of sub-Saharan Africa, and the Greeks borrowing the basis of their philosophy from black Africans, the Afrocentrists provide something that many black people both need and want. Some call Afrocentric ideas racist, and perhaps they are, at least to the extent that they claim that blacks are somehow superior to whites.

There need not be, however, anything inherently racist in supplying an everyday mythology that leads people to look at themselves and their history in a different way.

The truth of the matter is that we all live by myths. George Washington confessed to chopping down the cherry tree because he could not tell a lie. Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. The cowboy shot straight and never killed except in a fair fight at high noon. At bottom, all of these are outright falsehoods or half-truths. But we've heard them so

often that they've taken on their own reality to become a part of the American mythology.

The point is that everybody needs myths. Afrocentrism finds an audience, even among middle-class blacks, for that reason. There is also, of course, the fact of slavery, a historical reality no American can ignore. Slavery vanished more than 100 years ago and the civil rights movement has pried open the doors of opportunity for many black Americans, but a sense of disillusionment has nonetheless set in. We've made many gains and established rules to ensure fair play, but many believe that nothing has fundamentally changed.

We hear about glass ceilings. The *Washington Post*, where I work, has a good record for hiring blacks. Yet there is a genuine feeling of frustration among many blacks who work there, a sense that they've gone as far as they can go, that they will never climb to management's top rungs. If men and women who have master's degrees and, in some cases, years of professional experience feel this way, then what does the future look like to a high school dropout?

Afrocentrism is an understandable response to this despair.

The entire debate over the Afrocentric movement has been cast as a social phenomenon, but it's also about power. After centuries of comparative privilege, white people in America will have to get used to the idea that they must share power. Many whites find this difficult. Conversely, many blacks have trouble with the notion that the suffering of their forefathers and foremothers does not confer a special entitlement in today's world.

I sometimes like to think of America as a banquet at which whites have always sat at the table while blacks have grown the food, prepared the meal, and served it. It's to our credit that anybody who would like a place can now sit for supper, but some whites may feel dispossessed at having to share. And some blacks are unable to understand that they cannot nourish the spirits of their dead ancestors by eating more than their fair portion.

There is also this: Creating a new American community, evolving a collective and inclusive sense of identity that will allow us to continue as a nation means that some of us are going to give up our myths. Some time ago, I wrote an article about Afrocentrism. I spoke with a white woman from a conservative think tank who—and I put this charitably—seemed unaware that blacks (or women or Hispanics) had contributed to the making of America before the 1800s. She was clearly committed to some bizarre whites-only mythology of her own.

But I also interviewed a proponent of Afrocentrism who found it strange that any black American could refer to the Founding Fathers. This, despite the evidence that, yes, some signers of the U.S. Constitution may have had black descendents.

The point is that America's is not an easy history. A year or so ago, I visited a friend who works for the U.S. Forest Service in northern California. He is one of a handful of blacks living in the area. We were looking at a map of his district, and he pointed out a small river, Sambo Creek. "Shame," I said, tut-tutting the racist implications, until he said that the creek may have owed its name to the presence of black settlers. Whether you like the name or not, it stands as evidence that demands the acknowledgment of the men and women who may have lived there.

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It also stands as evidence of something that is too often left out of the history books. From the very first, Africans and Europeans came to these shores together. And, if it is true that the Europeans were making the Africans into Americans, then the reverse is also true. The Africans were making the Europeans into Americans as well.

Both parts of this last proposition are tough for some to understand, perhaps because it means surrendering the myth that Europeans were all-powerful and Africans entirely passive. We must, somehow, get beyond that, and Afrocentrism may actually represent an opportunity for those of us who truly believe in the possibility of a new American communi-

ty. Afrocentric thinking contains some distortions and many claims that are difficult to prove. But we ignore the reasons for its ascendence at our peril. It is equally dangerous to allow this debate to devolve into a question of whose mythology will prevail. We have to find a way out of the either-or trap as we work our way toward reaffirming the fact that we are all Americans. In the end, it's all we have.

This African American Still Feels Black

by Leon Wynter

"Black tells you about skin color and what side of town you live on," the Rev. Jesse Jackson said a few years ago, as he and others called for our name to be changed. "African American evokes a discussion of the world."

It's hard to argue with the gut feelings behind this identity enhancement, or to question the gnawing hunger within communities of color for a sustaining sense of self-worth. I'll go along with it, because the intention is positive, but I question the logic and doubt that "African American" will replace "black" in the hearts of people who fought for that appellation 20-odd years ago.

"Black" isn't good enough anymore, its small "b" was always an affront, holds one of the arguments for change. It won out (over Afro- and African American) only because it intimidated white folks, they say, because "black" sounded like there was a riot going on, a true revolution. But I say it was more than monosyllabic stylishness.

If the "blackest" hue was the most despised pigment in the U.S. melting pot, we turned it around, made it the most loved, and overcame the self-hatred that racism imposed. To me, "African American" takes a half-step back from this affirmation of what we have done—what we have made of

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America in our image—to gain supposedly firmer footing on African shores.

Black people have incorporated so much into our African selves over the centuries, in genes as well as culture, that identity has always been a source of confusion and division. Some will argue at length as to whether a coffee-colored American resident born in Cuba should properly think of himself as American, Cuban, Hispanic, Spanish, African, Nigerian, Yoruba, or some mixture. And many argue that as long as this man is black he can't be an American, because America has never wanted him. But there is no argument now about the basis upon which he faces discrimination here; being an African won't change the way America sees his skin.

There is a verity that holds that you "don't have to do nothing but be black and die," which pre-dates the 1960s identity struggle. When that struggle ended, "black" declared that our blood runs from Africa through every corner of the world and that our claim to wherever we stand, whether in Jamaica or Georgia, is valid. I've looked forward with pride to being "black" until I die. Or at least until America realizes that we're all one race, human, which I expect will be at least that long.

The appellation "African American" is no such assertion of humanity, but of a divided cultural nationality. I fear its pursuit will be to the detriment of our coming to terms with our citizenship without modifier, and our capital. My doctor, who thinks "African American" will suffice "until we drop the damn American part," disagrees. Hectoring me through a physical exam, she said Africa, the continent and the consciousness, is our future, not our heritage.

But she had to admit that "African American" didn't gain undivided allegiance 20 years ago, "because people weren't ready to be African back then." I thought of her words while waiting for a subway train, three levels under a corner of west Harlem where gunfire is common after dark, still smarting from the examination. The train was late, and the platform was full of Africans in America, from Haiti and

Alabama, Puerto Rico and Detroit, most heading home from work.

One miscreant pretended not to see us as he relieved himself at one corner of the platform. I thought, "If he knew he was an African American, with two capital letters and a heritage, could he stand there, urinating on this outpost of the motherland, and face himself in the mirror?" Maybe Rev. Jackson is right, and "black" has failed to keep us from self-destruction in an identity void.

But then I thought of how no one else on the platform even considered so degrading himself, or the community, though the late train strained us all. For most, I think, it was enough to know what our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, who maintained their great dignity no matter what they were called, would say to such behavior. I don't need the capital letters to be proud, even though I appreciate my African ancestry. The brother lacking an identity needs to be reacquainted with his most recent ancestors first, and what they paid for here.

Race Is Still a Black and White Issue

by Hugh Pearson

Race remains a black and white issue in our society because blacks and whites define the polar opposites of our informal racial caste system. There is some discrimination in our society against other non-whites, of course, particularly against Hispanics. But Asians and Hispanics, like Eastern European Jews, Irish, Poles, and Italians before them, are moving more swiftly than blacks toward acceptance by whites at the top of the caste system. In other words, Asians and Hispanics are becoming assimilated.

On the other hand, an almost natural revulsion toward black people is built into our nomenclature. I hear it every day in the way people use the word "black." For example, the actress Nicole Kidman, plugging her movie "To Die For" on TV, said, "well, it's morbid, but it's also funny. You know, it's a black comedy." On a local news channel in New York City, a reporter filing a story about a certain celebrity said, "little did anyone know he had a dark cloud lurking in his past." It's beyond my understanding how we as a nation could use the words "black" and "dark" in such negative ways and then turn around and think positively of black people.

Granted, we black people brought about the change from the label "negro" to "black," hoping that we could change the meaning of the word "black." But we failed. This failure was enhanced by what was ushered in by the change in labels—the youthful mid-1960s call for "black power." It was an era of black belligerence, which only exacerbated the neg-

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ative implications of the word "black." In essence, it ended up casting in stone our society's negative image of black people.

Thus our racial conversation remains a black and white dialogue, because "black" defines what it isn't good to be, while "white" defines our loftiest societal ideals.

Will this black/white obsession change as Hispanics become our largest minority in the next century? As it stands now, assimilated whites never think of themselves as white, except to compare themselves to blacks. As other groups assimilate, blending more successfully than blacks into a café-au-lait hybrid, we will see the emergence of an opposition between Americans and black Americans, as opposed to between whites and blacks.

There is an entire range of people considered Hispanic: black Hispanics, Cuban-Americans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, and so on. The same is true for Asians. I believe that the general designations "Hispanic" and "Asian" will fragment as these subgroups become larger and more prosperous. For instance, we'll hear white Hispanics of Cuban origin desiring acceptance as whites and insisting that they not be identified with black Cubans or Hispanics of Central American or Mexican origin. As more and more Hispanic and Asian groups gain acceptance under the white tent, the designation "white" will slowly become obsolete, giving way to a general "American" designation.

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We're beginning to see one variation of this movement away from simple racial designations in the efforts to include a "mixed-race" category in the census. These efforts are rejected by most black Americans because what has always glued blacks together as a people is the unwritten rule that however America feels about the least of us is a burden that must be shared by all of us. The least-accepted blacks are those who are the darkest, and few black Americans want to be accused of prejudice against the darkest among us, although in fact this prejudice is quite common. White America defined us by the "one-drop rule"—one drop of black African blood makes you black. Today we maintain that

definition, which in some ways is laudable because we are telling America that it must accept the darkest among us.

Of course some mixed-race people with small amounts of black African blood will be able to escape the "black" designation if they seek to, and a few blacks who clearly have a significant amount of black African blood will be able to assimilate as well. This is already the case with many black celebrities. But if current trends continue, most black Americans—75 percent of whom have some European blood, and 40 percent of whom have some Native American blood—will neither be willing nor able to escape blackness. And as long as a distinct self-destructive element among poorer blacks continues to exist, protected to a significant extent by the rest of black America, the negative image of blacks will remain. Eventually the nation will be talking about Americans versus black Americans.

Blacks will remain an informal caste beneath whites as long as there exists a black style implying that blackness is negative, such as the style accompanying rap music, and an attitude among non-blacks that blacks are not desirable people to be around. As long as this situation exists, most non-blacks will continue to gauge their acceptance in America according to how far removed they are from blacks, particularly poor blacks.

Does our unique black/white history justify our black/white obsession? Ultimately, yes. Don't get me wrong: We should include Hispanics and Asians in our history texts. But Hispanics and Asians—especially Asians—are following the same route to acceptance that ethnic whites once followed. Studying the history of our black/white divide can help us understand how this process works, and it can also help newcomers understand these issues. As long as blacks are thought of so negatively, public policy should continue to examine and explain our black/white focus.

How Multiculturalism Abuses Ethnoracial Categories

by David A. Hollinger

Multiculturalism is a large movement with many valuable variations, but the bulk of multiculturalism has been too conservative in one crucial respect: The movement has not struggled hard enough against the authority that skin color and shape of the face have historically been allowed to exert over culture. By defining diversity in terms of ethnoracial groups, multiculturalists have neglected, even suppressed, the abundant diversity within ethnoracial groups and beyond them.

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This failure is expressed in multiculturalism's willingness to use, as a basis for advancing the cause of *cultural* diversity, a framework originally designed to diminish discrimination triggered by *physical* characteristics. This framework I like to call "the ethnoracial pentagon." We find ourselves in this pentagon, each with our own assigned space, whenever a census taker or other public or private official asks us to declare that we are one or the other of the five identities now commonly called African American, Asian American, European American, Indigenous, or Latino.

These five categories constitute the ethnoracial pentagon. Three basic facts about the pentagon are so important, yet so imperfectly understood, that they bear constant repeating. First, the blocs wear labels that connote historical and

Parts of this essay are drawn from Professor Hollinger's book Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism *(Basic Books, 1995).*

cultural specificity. Second, the pentagon's architecture is that of traditional color-consciousness (black, yellow, white, red, and brown), and the pentagon is thus built on the most crude and invidious of popular images of what makes human beings different from one another. Third, this pentagon was actually manufactured out of enlightened, anti-racist materials—the need to count people in categories that could facilitate enforcement of anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation.

Although the pentagon has been taken up by multiculturalists as a convenient basis for measuring cultural diversity, the lines dividing the five parts of the pentagon are not designed to recognize coherent cultures. They are designed, instead, to correct injustices committed by white people in the name of the American nation, most but not all of which can be traced back to racial classifications based on morphological traits.

Culture abounds within all five blocs of the pentagon, and much of it has been created under circumstances of victimization and its memory. But even if the five blocs are understood as spaces relevant to the creation of culture and as rough groupings of specific cultural units, it remains true that culture is more relevant to the faint lines that divide the ethnicities within each of the five blocs than it is to the bold lines that divide the blocs from one another. Americans of Japanese, Navajo, or French descent all can claim a more particular cultural inheritance than can reasonably be ascribed to Asian Americans, Indigenous peoples, or European Americans in general. The tendency to treat the blocs of the pentagon as cultural rather than political categories risks saddling us with a sense of diversity grounded in an analysis not of cultural difference but of the history of victimization, justified largely by what we now recognize to be biologically superficial differentiators of human groups.

The experience of Latinos helps illustrate the pentagon's dynamics. Since the 1970s, Latinos have won more widespread recognition as a historically disadvantaged

minority that has suffered wrongs comparable to those suffered by the groups already called "races." These wrongs include discriminatory acts by whites in the 20th-century United States, but in the background is a slavery equivalent: the annexation of what is now the southwestern section of the United States from Mexico in 1848. This conquest is said to confer the status of an American-oppressed minority, even upon recent immigrants from parts of Mexico not conquered by the United States. Hence the logic of racial distinctions comes to embrace Latinos—including, by indirection, immigrants from El Salvador and Venezuela, countries that felt the force of American imperialism even less directly—despite the traditional Latino self-conception as non-Anglo white. Even if the victimization is symbolic, it is still the victimization that counts.

The way this system of classifications works can be further illustrated by comparing the status of Latinos with that of Jewish Americans. Jews were once widely thought of as a race, but are no longer. This transformation did not result primarily from scientific advances in biology and physical anthropology. Rather, prejudice against Jewish Americans within the American historical experience is judged to be less severe and damaging than prejudice against Latinos, who, because of that greater perceived victimization, are now said to constitute a race.

When we caution ourselves not to ignore race by conflating race and ethnicity, we generally mean to remind ourselves of the sharpest inequalities of treatment within America or in direct relation to its conduct in the larger world. Hence the blocs of the pentagon get their integrity not from biology, nor even from culture, but from the dynamics of prejudice and oppression in U.S. history and from the need for political tools to overcome the legacy of that victimization.

One striking consequence of multiculturalism's frequent use of the ethnoracial pentagon as a basis for advancing cultural diversity is that individuals whose cultural identities are seriously distorted when placed in one or another ethnoracial

box resist the pentagon, even in contexts where it is obvious that the function of the pentagon is political rather than cultural. Consider the struggle for cultural recognition of mixed-race people. The men and women and children who lobby the Census Bureau for official recognition as mixed-race have followed multiculturalism's use of the pentagon as a list of cultural identities. They want the census to add a "mixed-race" category, because census categories are seen as cultural labels, not as tools for addressing discrimination. San Francisco residents asked on a street corner how many racial categories should be listed in the census answered as often as not in strictly cultural terms. They took for granted that the reporter's question was about the public recognition of cultures, not about the facilitating of entitlements for victims of racism.

The routine public attribution of cultural significance to the blocs of a pentagon originally intended for the purpose of diminishing economic and political inequality has brought two valuable impulses in contemporary America into contradiction: first, the impulse to protect historically disadvantaged populations from the effects of past and continuing discrimination; and second, the impulse to affirm the variety of cultures that now flourish within the United States and even within individual Americans. Whatever we as a society decide to do with our ethnoracial pentagon, we would do well to remember both the tragic character and the depth of this contradiction.

I don't think the bind we are in would be quite so bad if academic multiculturalists had not been so determined to demonstrate the link between politics and culture—or, to put the point differently, had they not been so prone to exaggerate the political efficacy of cultural reforms. We now have a situation in which the word "culture" too often functions as a euphemism for race and ethnicity.

Searching for ways out of this contradiction, we might consider a speculation about religion. How might more attention to religiously defined cultures clarify our thinking about the role that ethnoracial categories should play in education?

Religious affiliations, like ethnoracial ones, have histories, and it is generally accepted that the degree of involvement in a religious community varies enormously. Religions are usually chosen in contexts that presume that an individual will follow in the religious orientation of his or her parents.

But the right of exit is more widely accepted in religious than in ethnoracial communities. A multiculturalism less conspicuously aloof from religious cultures would necessarily engage the right of exit as well as the dynamics of entry. Religious groups in America certainly have had their exclusions—often ethnoracial—but even the least evangelical of Protestant groups, such as Episcopalians and Unitarians, have generally prided themselves on welcoming newcomers to their particular communities of faith. The Roman Catholic Church, moreover, has long been one of the most demographically comprehensive voluntary associations in the United States. Islam is one of the most rapidly growing fellowships in this society. Even most varieties of Judaism, a more descent-defined religion, are open to converts.

To think of religious affiliations and ethnoracial affiliations as comparable requires us to place in brackets a host of traits that distinguish the two from each other. But this heuristic exercise may produce some interesting results.

One result might be the conclusion that religious groups merit some of the status and protection now afforded to ethnoracial groups. Some evangelical Christians have already proposed this, offering themselves as the newest minority in need of protection to guarantee its cultural equality and facilitate its survival in the face of a secular intellectual establishment. The separation between church and state should not be construed as a barrier, they say, to federal support for educational institutions that require adherence to certain religious doctrines.

In this view, the blurring of the line between religious and ethnoracial affiliations serves to remake religious groups in the contemporary image of ethnoracial minorities. The increasingly cultural valence of the ethnoracial pentagon pro-

vides the potential for a group, through its cultural role in a diverse society, to claim some of the protections provided to minority blocs within the pentagon—which is, after all, designed to facilitate the correction of abuses based on ascribed categories. This requires us to see religion in terms of an ethnic model of affiliations, with the understanding that ethnic affiliation holds a promise of entitlement that religious affiliation does not.

An element of this way of thinking is already embodied in the rights Amish communities have been guaranteed by the courts, enabling the Amish to perpetuate themselves as a distinct social community. Amish children are not obliged to attend school beyond the education provided within the Amish communities themselves, in order that the children not be exposed to the wider world. But this right to remain apart, as clarified in *Wisconsin* v. *Yoder*, applies to a group willing to rigidly separate itself from the larger society. What if a group wanting to use public schools asks for comparable protection of its way of life in that more public setting, demanding that schools diminish attention to threatening ideas?

So far, suits asking for this kind of protection have been unsuccessful. But a softer version of the same logic would simply give greater curricular attention to the ideas and values of religious communities represented in a given district, just as schools are often encouraged to develop curricula reflecting the ethnoracial composition of a local community. The widespread enthusiasm for creationism and for school prayer indicates that a strong constituency is ready to take advantage of whatever openings might follow from the application of the ethnic-minority paradigm to religious affiliations.

But one can instead reason in the opposite direction and apply a religious paradigm to ethnoracial affiliations. The implications of this approach are quite different, especially in view of the principle of separation of church and state. Ethnoracial affiliations recently have come to play a role similar to the one that religious affiliations have played throughout most of American history. It follows, then, that some of

the guarded-but-respectful attitude toward religious cultures expressed in the Constitution—and in the history of church-state decisions by the courts—might now judiciously be directed toward ethnoracial groups in their capacity as vehicles for culture.

In this second view, ethnoracial cultures ought to look after themselves much the way religious cultures have been expected to do. Both are sustained by voluntary affiliations. The products of both are to be welcomed as contributions to the richness of the nation's cultural life and thus as part of the environment for its politics. But both partake more of the private than the public sphere, and neither is to be the beneficiary of outright public subsidies. In the meantime, programs for affirmative action can continue to occupy the political space that was theirs alone before culture began to take over the ethnoracial pentagon.

Movement in this second direction—the religious model for ethnoracial cultures rather than the ethnic model for religious cultures—might reduce some of the pressure on public schools and on higher education to satisfy ethnoracial group needs for cultural self-validation. It might also turn educational policy toward explorations and displays of cultural diversity that are less politically pretentious. To the extent that educators can be relieved of some of their implicit responsibility for ensuring the prosperity of the nation's various communities of descent, educators may be less tempted to divide the entirety of culture into politically functional ethnoracial segments.

Beyond the Afrocentric Con

by Stanley Crouch

The emergence of Afrocentrism makes explicit a continuing crisis in the intellectual assessment of race, history, and culture in our nation. It serves as another example of how quickly we will submit to visions that are at odds with the heroic imperatives of shaping a cohesive society out of its fragmentary parts. When it comes to skin tone, we remain ever gullible, willing to sponsor almost any idea claiming to make fresh judgments of our society. Just as virtually anything can sell as art, no matter its lack of facility, most ideas can make their way onto our campuses and into our discussions of policy.

As a movement, Afrocentrism is another clever but simple-minded hustle that has descended from what was once called "the professional Negro," a person whose "identity" and whose "struggle" constituted a public commodity. James Baldwin became a master of that form, as a writer, speaker, and television guest, but he arrived before his brand of engagement by harangue was departmentalized. Now, like most areas of specious American ideas claiming to "get the story straight," this commodity sells as academic pancakes, buttered by the naive indignation of students and sweetened by gushes of pitying syrup.

At its core, though, Afrocentrism has little to offer of any intellectual substance. It benefits in spades from the decline of faith so basic to how intellectuals have fumbled the heroic demands of our time. The discontinuity of ideals and actions, the blood spore that is history, and the long list of

atrocities committed in the name of God and country have convinced many Western intellectuals that the only sensible postures are those of the defeatist and the cynic. As with the tenured Marxist, Afrocentrists will use the contradiction to define the whole, asserting that Western civilization is no more than the work of imperialists and racists who quest for an order of geo-political domination that is inextricably connected to profit and exploitation, white over black. Where the Marxist looks forward to a sentimental paradise of workers *uber alles*, the Afrocentrist speaks of a paradise lost and the possibility of a paradise regained—if only black people will rediscover the essentials of their African identity.

For all its pretensions to expanding our vision, the Afrocentric movement is not propelled by a desire to bring about any significant enrichment of our American culture. What Afrocentrists almost always want is power—the power to define, no matter how flimsy their cases might be. As with most movements built on conspiracy theories, only the sources of argument and the "proof" provided by Afrocentrists are acceptable; all else is defined as either willfully flawed or brought to debate solely in the interest of maintaining a vision of European domination throughout history and within the province of ideas. Thus, the worst insult is that critics are "Eurocentric." When charged with shoddy scholarship, the Afrocentrist's retort is that his or her purportedly revolutionary work arrives through means of research and assessment outside "European methodology."

Afrocentrism, then, presents itself as ethnic liberation, a circling of the wagons within the academy, an attempt to impale Eurocentric authority on the dilemma of black intellectual rebellion. At the same time, Afrocentrism is like all of the protest versions of study that are actually extensions of soap operas in which the stars are paid to emote the effects of injustice. It's about achieving the respect held for traditional disciplines while not measuring up to the standards of traditional research. Though ever scoffing at the academy, the Afrocentrists want all of the prestige and the benefits that

come with being there. No one should be surprised, since we live in a time in which it is not considered hypocritical to seek employment within a structure you claim is contemptuous.

A central component of the Afrocentric argument is that Egypt was black and that Greco-Roman Civilization resulted from its influence. This means that the foundation of Western Civilization is African. It's a relatively sophisticated version of Elijah Muhammad's Yacub myth, in which the white man is invented by a mad black scientist determined to destroy the world through an innately evil creature. Why this obsession with race and ancient Egypt? Firstly, monuments. There is no significant African architecture capable of rivaling the grand wonders of the world, European or not. Secondly, there is no written language or body of thought comparable to that upon which Western Civilization has built and developed its morality, politics, technology, economy, and arts.

More than a few of us yearn for pedigrees, wishing for access to aristocracy through the accumulated majesty of a long family line. If family won't do, then we might snatch the unwieldy crown of race for a coronation that defines the group as innately aristocratic. This has been the appeal of the Ku Klux Klan as well as the Nation of Islam—membership allows one to rise from the bottom and suddenly become part of an elite, the representative of a long historical process of superior individual and group engagement. Poor "white trash," existing at the very bottom of Southern society, become "real" white men when they don white sheets, gather at KKK rallies, and perform violent acts in defense of "white civilization." Negro criminals embrace a distorted version of Islam, coming to understand that the white man is "the devil" and that the black race is the "original" group, the parent of humankind. College students swallow Afrocentrism whole and conclude that all of their problems result from lacking an "African-centered" worldview that would provide them with an education suitable to their history and to their needs in a racist society.

These are all responses to humiliation—expressions of having taken the insults of the opposition too seriously, retreats from engagement, dismissals of complexity, racial isolationism. Essential to the justification for the myopic vision that emerges is a list of real and imagined atrocities. The great tragedies of the white South were the loss of the Civil War and the humiliation of Reconstruction; for the black nationalist, they were slavery, the colonial exploitation of Africa, and the European denial of the moral superiority of African culture and civilization, beginning with Egypt.

The success of Afrocentrism stems from these arguments, all of which have become part of the process through which democracy has had to assess the very definitions of humanity in order to move beyond prejudice. But we fail ourselves if we give in to the idea that because all human communities have equal access to greatness, then all cultures are equal. They are not. The ignorance, squalor, and disease of the Third World make that quite obvious, just as the rise of the Third Reich and the recent slide into overt tribalism in the Balkans prove that no body of ideas—democratic, capitalist, Marxist—is forever invincible to the barbarian call of the spiritual wild. Yet if there were not something intrinsically superior and magnetic about the way in which the West has gathered and ordered information and knowledge from all over the world—North, East, South, and West—other cultures would not so easily fall under the sway of what Malraux called "The Temptation of the West." The West has put together the largest and richest repository of human value, primarily because the vision of universal humanism and the tradition of scientific inquiry have slowly won out over provincialism through the most impressive investigations into the varieties of human life and the laws of nature.

This should be obvious to the Afrocentrists, but it's not in their career interests to look at the West and the rest of the world with equally critical visions. That would make their maudlin elevation of simplistic good and evil too difficult. The real question of bringing together one's ethnic heritage

with one's human heritage would come forward. It would not be so easy to manipulate the emotions of administrators and insecure students. The idea of embracing a circumscribed ethnic identity would not be seen as a form of therapy, a born-again way of ceasing to be an American shackled by feelings of inferiority and becoming a confident and wise African, albeit one connected to no specific group but bound somehow to Egypt, eschewing the fact most Negro Americans can trace their lineage no further than the west coast of Africa.

The Afrocentric goal is quite similar to that of the white South in the wake of Reconstruction. Having lost the shooting war, white racists won the policy war and had victory over the Constitution, raising a flag of segregation in which racial interests took precedence over our national vision of democratic rights. The result was that nearly a century of struggle took place in which the Constitution—through blood, thunder, and jurisprudence—took its rightful place as the law of the land, with no states' rights arguments accepted. In the wake of its own submission at a later Appomattox, Afrocentrists want to replicate the success of white segregationists, arguing for an inviolate way of life that precludes the national vision, one that can roll along inside of America but decide which of its laws and principles are worthy of adherence. The policy war is now over a segregated school curriculum. This idea of fusing genetics and cultural vision declares that race transcends place, that black Americans are but one segment of an international black world, and that they should shape their allegiances accordingly.

In essence, Afrocentrists want to live on a high grade reservation so they can ignore the national vision of human rights when it conflicts with their own tribal views. By attempting to win the souls of black college students and influence what is taught to black children in public schools, Afrocentrists seek a large enough constituency to maintain what power now exists and extend it to what segregation once promised—"separate but equal."

Yet the central failure of Afrocentrism is that it doesn't recognize that Afro-Americans have realized, over and over and often against terrible odds, the truest meanings of democratic possibility. Lincoln understood this when he told his secretary that, given his point of social origin, Frederick Douglass was probably the most meritorious man in the entire United States. Today, black Americans have risen to the top of every sector of our society as scientists, educators, aviators, politicians, artists, lawyers, judges, and athletes. We can never forget that our fate as Americans is, finally, collective. We fail our mission as a democratic nation whenever we submit to any sort of segregation that would remake the rules and distort the truth in the interest of creating or satisfying a constituency unwilling to assert the tragic optimism so intrinsic to our national heritage.

Part Two: Alternatives

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How To Teach About Ancient History: A Multicultural Model

by Frank J. Yurco

Today's school teachers have trouble finding reliable and updated curriculum sources on ancient history, particularly as it relates to the Near East. In recent years, Afrocentrists have tried to fill in the gaps with their own revisionist views. They have met with a great deal of success, especially in urban schools, where many Afrocentric materials have received official sanction despite their historical distortions and misinterpretations.

Much of the problem lies in teacher education programs, which largely fail to expose student teachers to the most current information on ancient history and cultures. Most teachers graduate from college with very little knowledge of the ancient world, which, if studied at all, was probably surveyed rather than closely examined. This failing echoes in the woeful misunderstanding of history exhibited by many students entering college.[1] Inadequate teacher preparation only reinforces the misinformation spread by Hollywood films, pseudo-scientific popular magazines, and the sensationalist writings of certain non-scholarly authors.

Thus, an information gap exists between institutions of

higher learning and K-12 teachers and students. The purveyors of Afrocentric ideas have exploited this gap to introduce their skewed ideas into the curriculum with materials like the Portland Baseline Afrocentric curriculum.[2]

To combat bad history, teachers should take advantage of the many museums and universities that offer educational outreach programs or provide enrichment courses to the public. Other resources are also available to teachers, including reliable translations of ancient texts as well as good histories and cultural studies of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Greeks, and Romans.[3] Several excellent popular journals also handle current archaeological research, such as the American Institute of Archaeology's *Archaeology*, the Biblical Archaeology Society's *Biblical Archaeology Review*, and the privately published *Kemet*. The American Institute of Archaeology offers membership to anybody interested, and it also has local branches across the country.

Another valuable resource is the academic alliance concept. Academic alliances are organized locally between colleges or universities and school teachers. They strive to create networks among professional scholars and K-12 teachers. In such programs, teachers are invited to attend lectures by specialists, and to approach and share ideas with scholars. Academic alliances have been formed in many places and cover many different subject areas. In Chicago, the Academic Alliance helped encourage and develop a project entitled *Extending the Great Conversation* (1989-1992), which involved 150 teachers from Chicago public schools in a 15-week program. Teachers studied the literature, history, and culture of ancient Egypt, ancient Mesopotamia, and ancient Greece with authorities in the field and learned that the whole Western literary tradition has its earliest roots in ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia. The program also introduced the teachers to Chicago's two major museums with exhibits and collections from Egypt and Mesopotamia—the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago and the Field Museum of Natural History. Teachers

learned how the museum exhibits can be used as enrichment sources for their lessons, and about the varied outreach and education programs of these museums.

Not only were the teachers excited by the new approaches to ancient history, but their students responded remarkably. Reading directly about the experiences of ancient peoples provided a distinct thrill for the students. By using newer and more reliable texts, rather than more traditional but also outdated materials, the teachers were able to relate experiences that held direct relevance for situations that the students faced daily. Even on a kindergarten level, such an approach excited and stimulated the students, especially because some of the ancient texts are stories and myths.[4]

The ancient peoples of Egypt and Mesopotamia wrote not only kinglists and historical materials, but also literary texts, myths, stories, poetry, economic and legal texts, and even letters. Such materials bring these ancient peoples to life as no standard school text can ever do. In the ancient societies, the career of scribe offered a means for advancement in society. The scribal schools thus produced literature extolling education and encouraged students to excel. These school texts are powerful motivators also for today's students. The words of the ancient scribal masters still ring true today: Education is the road for advancement.

The ancient sources, directly read and translated, also illustrate that these ancient societies experienced no racial prejudice. Ancient Egypt, contrary to Afrocentric claims, was a multi-colored society, with light to dark skinned peoples, and all shades in between.[5] The Ancient Egyptians ascribed physical and language distinctions among humans to their creator deity, Re-Atum, and his effort to distinguish the peoples.[6] Yet in their view all humans were created equally by the creator deity, and he spread his blessings on all humans, including non-Egyptians like the Syrians and Nubians,[7] who lived to the north and south of ancient Egypt. Other texts illustrate the rudiments of social justice and equality, especially concerning the rights of women.[8] Such readings

enhance the lessons of democracy and of social justice today.

The ancient Egyptians' lack of color prejudice should serve as another salutary lesson for us all today. It also contradicts the Afrocentric view that the ancient Egyptians called themselves and considered themselves "black."[9] Anthropological and artistic evidence shows that they did not.[10] Likewise, Afrocentric claims that the Egyptians were described as black by other ancient peoples are misrepresentations of fact. Herodotus and his contemporaries distinguished the Egyptians from the Kushites, their Nubian neighbors to the south. The Kushites were the blackest in complexion, and had the woolliest hair, according to the Classical sources, as Snowden has emphasized repeatedly.[11] The Egyptians were not as dark as the Kushites, though they did vary from light to dark brown, even as they do today, as one travels southward in Egypt.[12]

The ancient Mesopotamians were also ethnically mixed. From the earliest times Sumerians mingled with Semitic migrants from Arabia.[13] Later Indo-European peoples migrated from southern Russian areas into the Near East and intermingled with the Babylonian population in what is called the Kassite Era. The Hittites, too, were Indo-European.[14] Thus the whole population of Mesopotamia was multi-ethnic. Later in the First Millennium B.C., even more Indo-European peoples, such as the Persians and Medes, moved into the Near East. With the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great, the Greeks (another Indo-European population) entered Egypt and Babylonia. At that time, Hellenic ethnic chauvinism appears in Egypt under the Ptolemaic Dynasty.[15] Nonetheless, the Kushite-Meroitic peoples living south of Egypt in the Sudan were viewed very positively both by the Greeks and by the Old Testament.[16] In part, this stemmed from Kushite rule in Egypt, 712-663 B.C., when the Kushites resisted Assyrian domination and helped Hezekiah in 701 B.C.[17] It also stemmed from the fact that of all the Near Eastern powers, only the Kushites had remained independent of the Persian Empire.

The ancient Near Eastern world also reached out to farther parts of Asia and Africa, and encountered other world civilizations. A South Indian sailor who was shipwrecked in the Red Sea in 118 B.C., for example, demonstrated to the Ptolemaic Egyptian navy the techniques of sailing directly to India by making proper use of the Indian Ocean's monsoon winds.[18] A rich trans-oceanic trade soon developed, linking India and the Mediterranean. The Romans took control of this route after occupying Egypt in 30 B.C., and they extended the route eastward as far as Southeast Asia and China. The Muslims later expanded it to the East Indies, and Swahili traders opened another route southward along the East African coast.[19] Madagascar, though, had earlier been settled by ocean-crossing East Indians, eloquent testimony to their navigation and sea-going skills.[20] All these experiences made the Mediterranean world even more multicultural. Only the Americas, Australia, and Antarctica remained unknown to them.[21] Thus, the study of ancient history reveals a multicultural world—much like the world we inhabit today. Seen in this light, the lack of racial prejudice among the ancient peoples should be an especially strong legacy to us.

By studying these cultures through direct translations and other materials, we can learn firsthand about the ancient world's chief legacies. From Egypt came the 365 and one-quarter day calendar that we still use, as well as its subdivision into 12 months and 24-hour days.[22] The Egyptians also gave us a sophisticated use of geometry, as well as number usage and calculation based upon the power of 10, anticipating the metric system.[23] Egyptian papyrus and writing led to the development of books and helped develop a literary tradition.[24]

From Mesopotamia came the sexagesimal system, a number system based upon the power of 60 that is still used in our clocks and time-keeping. The earliest known algebraic equations also come from Mesopotamia.[25] Many early civilizations also developed astronomy. In Egypt, observation of the star Sirius was tied to the Nile flooding. The South Indians, East Indians, and Pacific peoples developed star-

based navigation, as well as oceanic current and wave pattern analysis, cloud and bird flight pattern analysis—all used in their highly sophisticated and successful trans-oceanic navigation and sailing.[26]

The proper study of ancient history should highlight the brilliant achievements of these many, diverse peoples. Western civilization owes a considerable cultural debt jointly to Egypt in Africa and to Mesopotamia, and indirectly to the wider world that those ancient cultures contacted and learned from. This is the true legacy of the ancient civilizations, and not the monocultural and African-centered view that the Afrocentrists present. Africa does indeed have a strong impact on this legacy, through Egyptian and Kushite contributions, but the legacy also comes from other, non-African cultures.

In conclusion, the direct study of ancient texts and the use of academically sound and scholarly historical sources offer us not only a fascinating glimpse of wonderful ancient civilizations, but also some valuable models in multicultural, ethnic, and racial toleration. Our entire ancient heritage is multicultural right from the start, with deep roots in both Africa and Asia. Today's teachers and students can surely profit from this history.

End Notes

[1] Feder, Kenneth. *Frauds, Myths, and Mysteries* (Mountainview, Calif.: Mayfield Publishers, 1990), preface, v-vi.

[2] Reviewed in Frank J. Yurco, "An Evaluation of the Portland Social Studies Baseline Essay," *Network News and Views* 10, no. 3 (March 1991) 21-26; also, Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, "Multicultural Pseudoscience: Spreading Illiteracy Among Minorities," *Skeptical Inquirer* 16, no. 1 (Fall 1991), 46-50; idem, "Magic Melanin: Spreading Scientific Illiteracy Among Minorities, Part II," *Skeptical Inquirer* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1992) 162-166.

[3] For example, for Egypt, Miriam Lichtheim. *Ancient Egyptian*

Literature, 3 vols. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California, 1973, 1976, and 1980); William Simpson Kelley, ed. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University, 1973); Nicholas Grimal. *A History of Egypt*, translated by Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Barry J. Kemp. *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989); T.G.H. James. *Pharaoh's People* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984); Wente, Edward F. *Letters From Ancient Egypt* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); Moran, William L. *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992); and R.B. Parkinson. *Voices From Ancient Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991).

[4] Based upon Ms. Mary Sigman's experience as a kindergarten teacher in the Chicago Public School system.

[5] Yurco, Frank J. "Were the Ancient Egyptians 'Black' or 'White'?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 15, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1989) 25-29, 58; also Bruce Trigger, "Nubian, Negro, Black, Nilotic?" in *Africa in Antiquity:* The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1978), vol. I, The Essays, pp. 26-35.

[6] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. II, pp. 96-100, esp. p. 98.

[7] Ibid, and *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. I, pp. 106, and 131-132.

[8] Ibid, vol. I, pp. 131-132, especially top, p. 132, Coffin Text, no. 1131-1132.

[9] For instance, Cheikh Anta Diop, "Origins of the Ancient Egyptians," in G. Mokhtar, ed. *General History of Africa*, 8 vols. (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 36-39.

[10] Anthropological studies, see, A. Batrawi, "The Racial History of Egypt and Nubia, Part I," *Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 75 (1945) 81-101; idem, "The Racial History of Egypt and Nubia, Part II," *Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 76 (1946) 131-156; and Shomarka Keita, "Studies of Ancient Crania from Northern Africa," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 83 (1990) 35-48; C. Loring Brace et al. "Clines and Clusters Versus 'Race': A Test in Ancient Egypt and The Case of a Death on the Nile." *The Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 36 (1993) 1-31. For the artistic evidence see, Frank Snowden, Jr. *Before Color Prejudice: The ancient view of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983); and idem, "Bernal's 'Blacks',

Herodotus, and Other Classical Evidence," *Arethusa*, special issue (Fall 1989) 83-95; and Yurco. "Were the Ancient Egyptians 'Black' or 'White'?", pp. 25-29, 58.

[11] Snowden, see note 10, above, and idem. *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Graeco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1970; and idem, *Blacks in the Ancient Greek and Roman World: An Introduction to the Exhibit* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Library, 1987).

[12] Trigger, Bruce, "Nubian, Negro, Black, Nilotic?", pp. 26-35, and Yurco, "Were the Ancient Egyptians 'Black' or 'White'?" pp. 25-29, 58, and Snowden, notes 10-11 above.

[13] Oppenheim, A. Leo. *Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, 2nd ed., revised by Erica Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), pp. 48-63.

[14] Gurney, O.R. *The Hittites*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), pp. 17-18, 117-131, and J. G. MacQueen. *The Hittites and their contemporaries in Asia Minor*, rev., enl. ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 22-26, and 35.

[15] Lewis, Naphtali. *Greeks in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1986).

[16] Snowden, notes 10-12, above.

[17] Yurco, Frank J., "The Shabaka-Shebitku Coregency and the Supposed Second Campaign of Sennacherib against Judah: A Critical Assessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991) 35-45; and Kitchen, Kenneth A. *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986), pp. 383-386, and 552-553.

[18] Tarn, W.W. *Hellenistic Civilisation*, 3rd. ed. (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), pp. 247-248.

[19] Horton, Mark, "The Swahili Corridor," *Scientific American* 257, no. 3 (1987) 86-93.

[20] See, Mervyn Brown. *Madagascar Rediscovered* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1979); John Mack. *Madagascar: Island of the Ancestors* (London: British Museum, 1986); and Otto C. Dahl. *Migration from Kalimantan to Madagascar* (Oslo: Norwegian University, 1991).

[21] Yurco, Frank J., "Pre-Columbian Voyages to the Americas?" *Skeptical Inquirer*, forthcoming.

[22] Parker, Richard, A., "The Calendars and Chronology," in J.R. Harris, ed. *The Legacy of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 13-26.

[23] Gillings, Ron J. *Mathematics in the Time of the Pharaohs* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1972; Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Books, 1981).

[24] Cerny, Jaroslav. *Books and Paper in Ancient Egypt* (London: University College, 1952; reprint, Chicago: Ares Press, 1985).

[25] Neugebauer, Otto. *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, 2nd. ed. (Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 1957), pp. 3-70.

[26] Lewis, David. *The Voyaging Stars*, and idem. "The Pacific Navigators' Debt to Ancient Seafarers of Asia," pp. 44-66.

What Every Student Should Know

Every American student, regardless of race, should know about the African American contribution to American history and understand the black experience in the United States. For decades, history textbooks ignored both. Since the 1960s, however, textbooks and school curricula have included more information about African Americans and other minorities. As Frances FitzGerald exhaustively documented in her 1979 book, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century*, "The texts of the sixties contain the most dramatic rewriting of history ever to take place in American schoolbooks." By the early 1970s, she notes, most texts included extensive entries on blacks, not only in sections on slavery or the Civil War but as active participants in the Colonial period, the American Revolution, the Spanish-American War, the Truman Administration, as well as during those periods when racial issues dominated American politics. At the same time, schools were transforming their social studies curricula to include many more offerings on non-Western civilizations, including those of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. By the early 1990s, another wave of textbook revision swept the schools, placing even greater emphasis on America's ethnic and racial minorities. It is simply inaccurate to claim, as many Afrocentrists do, that social studies texts today ignore the contribution of black Americans or other minority groups.

Nonetheless, textbook descriptions can often be flat and sterile, giving a minimum of information or failing to place it in proper context. As Frank J. Yurco suggests in his essay, "How To Teach About Ancient History," there is no substi-

tute for primary texts. The Center for Equal Opportunity, therefore, asked several prominent writers, educators, elected and appointed officials, and business leaders to answer this question:

> **What single book on Africa or the African American experience should every high school student read before graduation, and why?**

Some selected one book, others a series of books, and Gerald Early offered a list of 25. It is our hope that the following recommendations will encourage teachers, parents, and students to learn more about American and world history and the role Africans and African Americans have played in it. —*L. C.*

William B. Allen

Dean, James Madison College, Michigan State University

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Cato, by Joseph Addison

George Washington's favorite drama, outside of and without any relation to current ideological struggles, best portrays the choice between roots and virtue, whether the roots be African or European. Every human being is an Alcibiades when it comes to this question: Which is stronger, ambition or identification? Only for those for whom ambition holds no promise is identification a suitable response.

Kwame Anthony Appiah

Professor of Afro-American Studies and Philosophy, Harvard University

Things Fall Apart, by Chinua Achebe

Achebe's novel is the most widely taught and read book in African secondary schools. By reading it, American children would certainly gain something in common with African children. Elegantly written, it details the beginnings of modern relations between African culture and Europe.

Tony Brown

PBS Commentator, Tony Brown's Journal

Sex and Race (3 vols.), by J.A. Rogers

The most foolish concept human beings have ever come up with is race. Rogers exposes the myth of race in this series while chronicling the exciting points in history with unusual and well-documented facts. Best of all, Rogers encourages further study.

Keith A. Butler

Detroit City Councilman and
Pastor of Word of Faith Christian Center

On the Road to Economic Freedom, by Robert Woodson

This book gives a complete view of the African American experience, and sends the message that will lead to success in the African American community. I think it is imperative that every African American high school student, before graduation, be made aware that African Americans have not always been at the bottom of the economic ladder. They need to know that during post-slavery, African Americans owned their own banks, businesses, and were entrepreneurs in many economic markets. They must understand that these same successes can become their reality in the future.

Lynne V. Cheney

W.H. Brady, Jr. Distinguished Fellow,
American Enterprise Institute

My Bondage and My Freedom, by Frederick Douglass

Douglass's autobiography not only makes clear the horrors of slavery, but the indomitability of the human spirit. It emphasizes values we would wish all our children to share, particularly hard work and persistence, even in the face of the most awful adversity.

Joe Clark

Former Principal of East Side High School, East Orange, New Jersey

The Content of Our Character, by Shelby Steele

Young black Americans must understand that their ultimate freedom rests with the extrication from the manacles of victimization.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University

The Souls of Black Folk, by W.E.B. DuBois

This book is so very important because it defined the peculiar status of the African American through the metaphor of "double-consciousness" and "the veil." He was a lyrical poet, as well as a philosopher. He was—and remains—the most sublime thinker that people of African descent have produced.

Nathan Glazer

Professor of Education and Sociology Emeritus, Harvard University

The Negro in the United States, by E. Franklin Frazier
From Slavery to Freedom, by John Hope Franklin

Unfortunately, I know better what students shouldn't read than what they should—the variety of volumes I have seen, by people whose names I can't recall, claiming imaginary glories for Africa. The problem in the question is that it assumes a link between Africa and the African American experience that is tenuous at best—even the old debate between E. Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits on African survivals dealt only with survivals. Has the upsurge of Afrocentrism and the vast increase of Afro-American studies resulted as yet in a book better than Frazier's *The Negro in the United States* or *From Slavery to Freedom* by John Hope Franklin? I would be open to the argument that there is a better single book, but for the moment I'll set these forward as my candidates.

Andrew Hacker

Professor of Political Science, Queens College

Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal, by Andrew Hacker

Niger Innis

National Spokesman, Congress of Racial Equality

Up From Slavery, by Booker T. Washington

The boot strap conservatism expressed in Washington's book is a philosophy of life that sustained the black community during its darkest hour and may be our only salvation for the 21st century.

Rosalind Johnson

Teacher of French and Spanish,
Prince George's County, Maryland

Maggie's American Dream, by James Comer
Yes I Can: The Autobiography of Sammy Davis, Jr.
The Contender, by Robert Lipsyte

Maggie's American Dream discusses acculturation and the problems of growing up in an urban setting. It shows what educational process worked in allowing Maggie, as a black American, to become a full member of American society. *The Contender* also takes place in an urban area. It shows the kinds of choices the main character, who wants to be a boxer, has to make every day in order to avoid joining a gang and participating in the decline he sees all around him. Sammy Davis, Jr.'s autobiography lets children see that theatrical talent allowed him to achieve a place in mainstream America. Davis never felt fully accepted, but the book shows how he came to terms with it.

Glenn Loury

Professor of Economics, Boston University

Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison
Native Son, by Richard Wright
The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin
The Autobiography of Malcolm X
The Content of Our Character, by Shelby Steele
"Letter from a Birmingham Jail," by Martin Luther King, Jr.
Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? by Martin Luther King, Jr.
Hunger of Memory, by Richard Rodriguez

The Ellison and Wright novels share a classic importance as pieces of literature, despite their contrasting outlooks on the black American condition and, indeed, the human condition. For non-fiction, the eloquence and sheer power of language makes Baldwin's book required reading. I don't personally agree with parts of it, but its historical significance can't be overlooked. Further down on the list, students could read Malcolm X and Shelby Steele in conjunction to learn about different eras of the civil rights movement. Selected works by Martin Luther King, Jr. would enrich these lessons. Finally, for African American students especially, I would recommend Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*. Even though Rodriguez isn't black—he's Mexican American—his views of the public and private spheres of life and the maturation of moving from home to cosmopolis are particularly valuable.

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Erich Martel

Teacher of History, Woodrow Wilson High School, Washington, D.C.

Before the Mayflower, by Lerone Bennett
Before Color Prejudice, by Frank Snowden, Jr.

Bennett's book is very comprehensive and very readable. Snowden's book explains how race and color prejudice did not exist before modern times.

Deborah McGriff

Vice President of the Edison Project and
Former Superintendent of Schools, Detroit, Michigan

Before the Mayflower, by Lerone Bennett

This classic provides a comprehensive examination of the African American experience.

Michael Meyers

Executive Director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition

There is no "single" book I would offer; but there are several. I would include on such a list these books: *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison; *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison; *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker; *Dark Ghetto*, by Kenneth B. Clark; *The Development of Segregationist Thought*, by I.A. Newby; *The Black Power Imperative*, by Theodore Cross (don't be misled by the title); *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *The Fire Next Time*, by James Baldwin; *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, by Eugene Genovese; and *The Black Image in the White Mind*, by George Fredrickson. Orlando Patterson's *Ethnic Chauvinism* is probably too high-browed and intellectual for high school students, but college students should read it. Patterson is a true scholar; his book on slavery, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, is also very good.

In terms of poetry, Rita Dove, Derek Walcott, Maya Angelou (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *I Shall Not Be Moved*), and Langston Hughes (*Selected Poems*) have some solid contributions.

I would also recommend the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, by Frederick Douglass, and *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright. For an easy-to-read overview of the "Civil Rights Years," Juan Williams's *Eyes on the Prize* is pretty good.

Senator Carol Moseley-Braun

Democrat-Illinois

The Sneetches, by Dr. Seuss

The Sneetches is the story of the ways in which people exploit prejudice. The story eliminates the extraneous and points out how similar we (or the Sneetches) really are.

Wilson J. Moses

Professor of History, Pennsylvania State University

Before the Mayflower, by Lerone Bennett
Three Negro Classics, Edited by John Hope Franklin
The World and Africa, by W.E.B. DuBois

My choice would be Lerone Bennett's *Before the Mayflower* for the average student, but I would like to see better students in the accelerated programs and more competitive schools supplement this with John Hope Franklin's *Three Negro Classics* (which includes Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery*, W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, and James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*) and W.E.B. DuBois's *The World and Africa*. I stress Bennett's *Before the Mayflower* because it is written in a literate but unpretentious style. Its tone is essentially optimistic, its philosophy is essentially integrationist, and it encourages self-respect, rather than ethnic chauvinism. It displays a faith in democratic traditions under constitutional government.

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Deroy Murdock

President, Loud & Clear Communications

Black Like Me, by John Howard Griffin

This gripping story of a white writer who artificially darkens his skin to experience racism in the Jim Crow South gives a unique perspective of racism in that era. His subsequent death due to skin cancer gives his story an even more ironic poignancy.

Michael Novak
Jewitt Chair in Religion and Public Policy, American Enterprise Institute
Race and Economics, by Thomas Sowell
Links economics to culture, and shows that there are several different black cultures in America.

Hazel O'Leary
Secretary of Energy
Up From Slavery, by Booker T. Washington
This book is the paradigm of how one's thirst for knowledge and education can be rewarding in spite of obstacles.

Bruce Perry
Author
The Content of Our Character, by Shelby Steele
To my knowledge, Shelby Steele's book was the first to explore the self-destructive aspects of the psychology of victimization that prevails in the African American community.

Sylvia Peters
Founding Partner, The Edison Project
The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass
There are so many books to choose from, but for more than 20 years this one has meant the most to me.

Diane Ravitch
Senior Fellow, Mahattan Institute
Dictionary of American Negro Biography, Edited by Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winson
This book is a well-written, carefully researched collection of biographies of distinguished African Americans. It shows the enormous range of accomplishment in the African American community and offers role models in many different fields going far beyond the names encountered in textbooks.

Gwen Daye Richardson

Editor, National Minority Politics

Succeeding Against the Odds, by John H. Johnson

This book, by the CEO of Johnson Publishing (*Ebony, Jet*), shows how a person can rise above poverty and racism to become one of the richest men in America.

Franklin L. Smith

Superintendent of Schools, Washington, D.C.;
Chief State School Officer

Days of Grace, by Arthur Ashe

Days of Grace, the autobiography of Arthur Ashe, is recommended because Mr. Ashe's diversified life depicts a universal example of extraordinary character, brilliance, strength, and wisdom. Further, *Days of Grace* reveals insight concerning specific universal problems and life situations including, but not limited to, race relations, poverty, parenting, self-esteem, and character building.

Shelby Steele

Professor of English, San Jose State University

Shadow and Act, by Ralph Ellison

This book contains the best discussion of black American culture ever written. More important, it shows that black and white cultures are not separate and how they have interacted to produce a common American culture. The emphasis is on the American-ness of each.

Abigail Thernstrom

Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute;
Adjunct Professor, Boston University

Black Boy, by Richard Wright

An American classic. The best single work on growing up in the Jim Crow South.

Stephan Thernstrom
Winthrop Professor of History, Harvard University
Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?, by Thomas Sowell
The best brief introduction to the question of when, how, and why the civil rights movement took the wrong track.

Clarence E. Walker
Professor of History, University of California-Davis
The White Man's Burden, by Winthrop D. Jordan
This book does the best job explaining the genesis of black-white conflict in America from the 17th century to 1800.

Anthony Walton
Writer
Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison
This great novel, which has yet to be fully analyzed or understood in all of its truth and complexity, gives unvarnished and unsentimental insight into virtually all areas of individual and community African American experience, for better or for worse. And, in that stunning last sentence, it reveals that black experience is at bottom human experience, relevant and of deep meaning to all.

Juan Williams
Washington Post
Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison
I don't think there is any more emotionally and intellectually complete telling of the tale than in this novel.

Louis Wilson
Associate Professor and Chair of Afro-American Studies, Smith College
History of West Africa (Vols. I & II), Edited by J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder

From Slavery to Freedom, by John Hope Franklin
Most African Americans come from various parts of West Africa. Ajayi's book demonstrates the complexities of West African societies. Franklin's book is the best survey of Afro-American history.

Robert Woodson

President, National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

From Plantation to Ghetto, by August Meier and Elliot Rudwick
An excellent history of the black experience that emphasizes the strengths of the black community. A non-victim book.

Anne Wortham

Associate Professor of Sociology, Illinois State University

Up From Slavery, by Booker T. Washington
Washington demonstrates the importance of persistence and purpose. He describes how to transcend dehumanizing experiences and still retain a human spirit.

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Elizabeth Wright

Editor, Issue & Views

The Negro in Business, by Booker T. Washington
Up From Slavery, by Booker T. Washington
Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans, by John Sibley Butler
The Content of Our Character, by Shelby Steele
The Butler book incorporates and expands on the early Washington data. Together, these three books document how ordinary blacks, even under social restrictions, successfully participated in America's capitalist system, before the masses were directed away from such efforts. Shelby Steele's book helps us understand the forces, both social and psychological, that have propelled blacks onto the easier track of special privileges and away from those earlier self-reliant initiatives.

Leon Wynter

Reporter, The Wall Street Journal

Elbow Room, by James Alan McPherson

There is no one black experience, so I can't think of the best single book. Allow me to recommend a collection: James Alan McPherson's prize-winning group of short stories, *Elbow Room*. Its primary virtue is that the stories imagine several unique black experiences and make them real, without attempting to tell the reader what it means to be black. I read it some years ago and still remember that the first story puts you inside the head of a 10-year-old black boy coping with a love for elementary school square dancing. The last story paints a fantastic rake of a black man who repossesses cars for a living and walks on the wild side. The writing is butter; the characters are unforgettable.

Frank J. Yurco

Egyptologist, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois

The Legacy of Egypt (2nd. edition), Edited by J.R. Harris

This book lays out the legacies in various subject fields that ancient Egypt provided to us through the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Gerald Early

Professor of English and Director of the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri

1. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*
2. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe
3. *Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain
4. *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, by Mark Twain
5. *Up From Slavery*, by Booker T. Washington
6. *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe
7. *Tell Freedom*, by Peter Abrahams
8. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, by C. Vann Woodward
9. *When Harlem Was In Vogue*, by David L. Lewis
10. *Not Without Laughter*, by Langston Hughes
11. *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*, by Langston Hughes
12. *Black Boy*, by Richard Wright
13. *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, by Anne Moody
14. *Before the Mayflower*, by Lerone Bennett
15. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, by Paule Marshall
16. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, by James Baldwin
17. *Middle Passage*, by Charles Johnson
18. *The Marrow of Tradition*, by Charles W. Chesnutt
19. *Stride Toward Freedom*, by Martin Luther King, Jr.
20. *The Content of Our Character*, by Shelby Steele
21. *Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just*, by Kenneth Manning
22. *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition*, by Jacques Barzun
23. "Princes and Powers" from James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name*
24. "Harlem Ghetto" and "Notes of a Native Son" from James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*
25. *The Mind of the South*, by W.J. Cash

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Contributors

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Gerald Early is Professor of English and Director of the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He is editor of *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation* (Viking, 1993) and author of *Daughters: On Family and Fatherhood* (Addison Wesley, 1994).

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Wilson J. Moses is Professor of History at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author, among other books, of *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford University Press, 1978).

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Louis Wilson is Associate Professor and Chair of Afro-American Studies at Smith College.

Leon Wynter writes about business and race for the *Wall Street Journal.* He is also a regular commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered."

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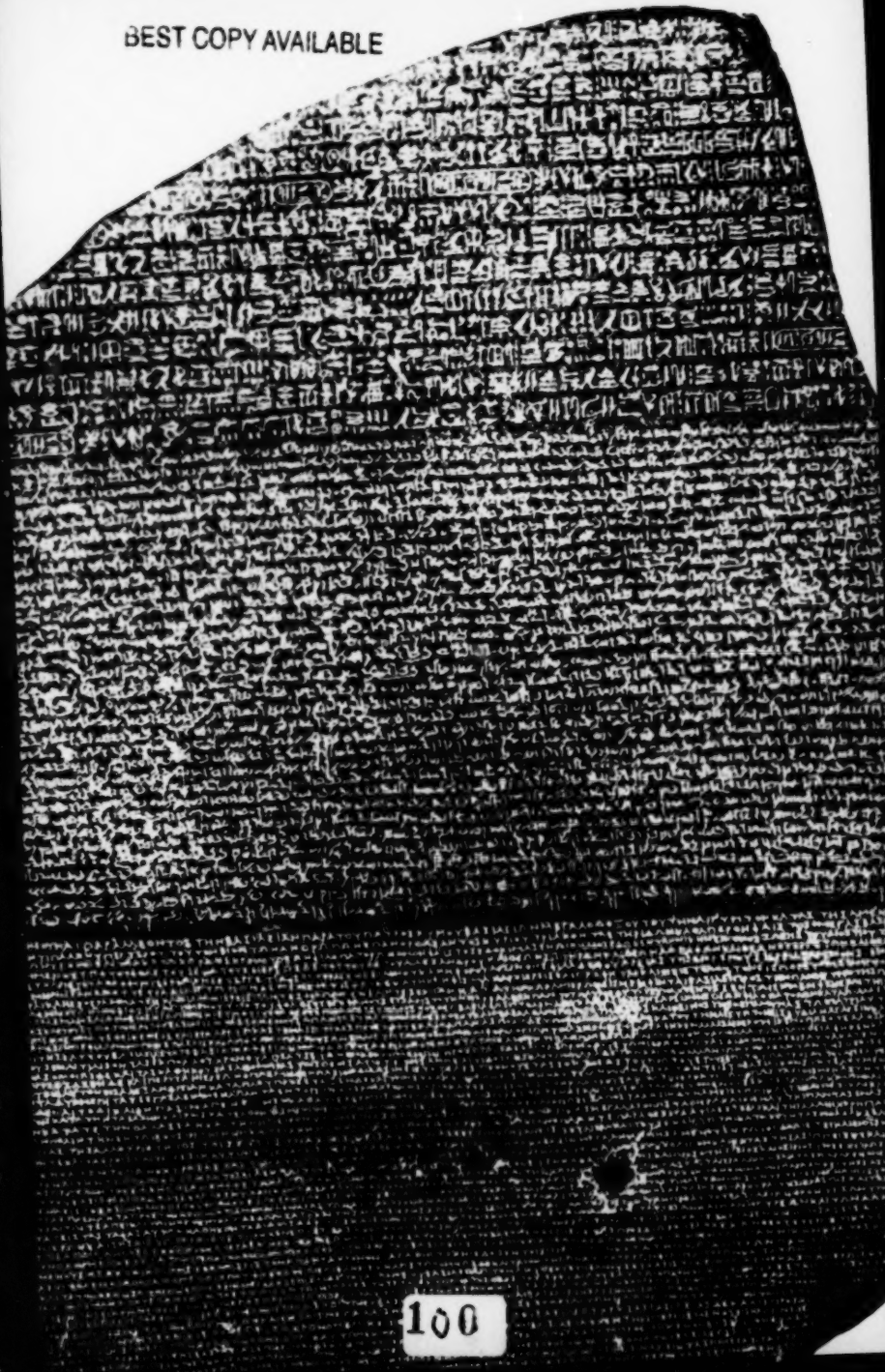

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